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By BENNETT SIMON, M.D.
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Putting our best face forward

By Stephen Koss

PHILIP M. TAYLOR:
The Projection of Britain
British overseas publicity and propaganda 1919-1939
363pp. Cambridge University Press.
£25.
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Children are taught - or, at any rate, they used to be - that sticks and stones might break their bones, but that names could never harm them. As they grow up, they come to realize that painful wounds can be inflicted by verbal assaults from which they must protect themselves.

Modern nations, whether in times of peace or war, usually reach the same conclusion. For this reason, the more sensitive among them have expended considerable funds and effort to defend their reputations. Some have managed more successfully than others to present a credible image of themselves, though not necessarily consonant with the merits of their respective cases: Mussolini's Italy qualifies as a case in point. True to form, the devil has orchestrated some of the best times.

The British have proved singularly inept in the conduct of national publicity, with the result that their successive adversaries have been able to impugn their motives and exploit their weakness in the eyes of the world. Rarely has this failing been more apparent than at the present moment, when scarcely an attempt has been made to clarify, much less defend, official policies in Northern Ireland. In the face of vociferous condemnation, British spokesmen have maintained a self-incriminating silence.

The effects are visible on the streets of New York and other American cities, where IRA demonstrators maintain a daily vigil, parading with empty coffins and chanting their abusive slogans outside British governmental offices. British banks and commercial establishments have been forced, quite literally, to lower their flags. Royal visits have been disrupted or quietly cancelled. The American media, including certain mass-circulation newspapers with strong British connections, have overwhelmingly joined the onslaught.

The *Daily Mail*, evincing a heroic concern for journalistic veracity, revealed that the correspondent for the New York *Daily News* had outrageously fabricated the interviews with British military personnel that he dispatched last summer from Belfast. By then, of course, the damage was done. There are those who would argue that, in fact, the damage was done generations earlier, when aggrieved Irishmen emigrated in massive numbers to the United States, Canada, Australia, and elsewhere. According to this fatalistic view, recently propounded by a columnist in *The Times*, anti-British feeling within these transplanted communities is so deeply ingrained that any attempt to counteract it must prove futile; the implicit assumption, grievously mistaken, is that only those of Irish extraction are prey to such delusions as that Ulster, the last outpost of a crumbling empire, is being held against her will for the sake of expected discoveries of offshore oil. I was, in fact, invited to debate this very point with a New York State Assemblyman on a New York television station.

No more realistically, others cling to the presumption - half arrogance and half wishful thinking - that the fundamental righteousness of the British cause will (as in 1940-41) speak for itself. Why gild the lily? And, finally, there are those latter-day Palmerstonians who profess an indifference to foreign disapprobation and who go further to welcome unpopularity as a mark of national distinction.

Philip M. Taylor, though he does not speak directly to these immediate issues, puts them effectively into perspective. His book deals with the little and sometimes pathetic attempts that were made during the interwar decades to inform and thereby to influence overseas opinion. The ideological challenges, like the budgetary constraints, were strikingly similar. Then, as now, British administrators lacked not so much the mechanisms of the assurance to assert their aims.

The author has borrowed his cinematic title from a pamphlet, "The Projection of England", written in 1932 by Sir Stephen Tallents, who looms large in the present narrative. Described amusingly as an "unusual man", who boasted a "skill in bookbinding in retsinn" and an "expertise in cooking squirrels for his dinner guests", Tallents burrowed rodent-like through the

Foreign Office, the Tinsel Association, the Overseas Propaganda Committee, the GPO, the BBC, and eventually the reconstituted Ministry of Information. His ideas and frustrations were alike significant as a commentary on the British predicament. "No civilised country can today afford to neglect the projection of its national personality or to resign its projection to others," insisted Tallents, who strove to exploit and to improvise every conceivable means to achieve "the effective projection and sympathetic receipt of England's image".

Tallents's supposition, not uncommon among his compatriots, was that to know England was *ipso facto* to love her. It seemed hardly necessary, therefore, for Englishmen to practise the arts of "self-advertisement", which were allegedly beneath their dignity; all that was required was "honest self-expression" in order to dispel the growing impression that the country was too "down and out" to exert its historic moral leadership. Sir Arthur Willer, a trained specialist in press relations, countered that "an adequate system of national advertisement" was wholly compatible with a proud tradition of "British modesty". Both pivotal figures, they drew on expedient distinctions between publicity, the natural manifestation of self-respect, and propaganda, which had a pejorative ring to it. Although Taylor is disposed to uphold this difference, he shows that the two categories were never mutually exclusive, that they derived from the same impulse, and that they increasingly overlapped.

That propaganda, "generally speaking... was not an activity with which British officials felt comfortable" may help to explain why they tended to resort to euphemisms ("Cultural Diplomacy" or, more innocuously, "education") and why they fared so poorly in the game. But there were transcendent factors. E. H. Carr has shrewdly observed that "the success of propaganda in international politics cannot be separated from the successful use of other instruments of power". The reduction of Britain's defence capacity, coupled with relative economic decline, cannot be disregarded.

It was always difficult and perhaps embarrassing to specify where publicity left off and propaganda began. The personalities whom Taylor depicts constantly contradicted themselves as well as each other by the definitions they ventured. To Sir John Reith, "news is the shocktroops of propaganda", whereas an unidentified Foreign Office commentator was convinced that propaganda had ended with the Armistice in 1918 and the demobilization of Lord Northcliffe. Stephen Gaselee agreed with Reith that "news proceeding from Great Britain will ordinarily be favourable to us" and could be trusted to "stand on its own legs" without either subsidy or adornment. Anthony Eden, urging a measure of financial assistance for Reuters, obviously had his doubts. Earl Winterton, rejecting "propaganda in the bad sense", proclaimed his belief "in objectivity, in unadorned news and sincere views, honestly expressed". There was some dispute among professionals, however, as to whether news and views of domestic strife were suitable commodities for export. Rex Leeper, for one, thought it "sheer nonsense" for the BBC to transmit over its Empire Service "straight news... which can do us harm with the people we are addressing".

The formula, as it evolved through the 1930s, was for "propaganda with facts", but facts were ordinarily determined by circumstance. In 1938, there occurred a rethinking: "white" (overt) as opposed to "black" (covert) propaganda was deemed warrantable and stepped up.

Taylor makes the telling point that propaganda can be distinguished from publicity by the calculations that inspired it and, more decisively, by the level at which it was pitched. "British propaganda was directed not towards a mass audience, at least not directly, but towards the educated classes of foreign societies." The BBC's Arabic programme, awkwardly inaugurated with the report of a political execution in Palestine, was designed to attract listeners "almost entirely from the Effendi class", ignoring "the man under the palm tree" who might be "lucky enough to be near a receiver"; it differed sharply from the rival Italian broadcasting system, which distributed free wireless sets (ingeniously locked into Italian frequencies) and played selections from Verdi (*Aida*, one imagines) punctuated by lurid accounts of British atrocities in the Near East. Around the globe, the British performance was much the same. Sir William

Wiscman, the head of British intelligence in the United States, sensibly warned that British propagandists were concentrating too heavily on "one small segment" of the American population, namely the privileged few "who live on Fifth Avenue" in what may be designated, Alister Cooke Territory. Nevertheless, a British Council official who headed film distribution wrote off "the unintelligent (who do not matter to us anyway)" and scoffed at Philip Guedalla's suggestion - too flippantly put for its own good - that the Council should "place ourselves in the position of a low-class Maltese (tobaccoist)".

It is depressing to reflect that such snobberies persist, and that they are attended by many of the same bureaucratic muddles and commercial disadvantages. Taylor's study, by the light it sheds on unchanging British attitudes, could not be more topical or, for that matter, more instructive. Yet, on its own terms, it attains only a qualified success. Abandoning "a chronological spiral cord... in favour of a thematic treatment", *The Projection of Britain* suffers from a number of structural and stylistic defects. There is an unfortunate amount of repetition from one chapter to another, and the background material at the beginning of each section is disconcertingly reductive. The author has a penchant for split infinitives and for *Time*-magazine labels: "Foreign Secretary Balfour" and "Prime Minister Chamberlain". One wishes to purge "about" from his lexicon.

More importantly, the demarcation between spheres of domestic and foreign activity is left undetermined at various critical junctures. Admittedly, Sir John Simon had to be reminded that foreigners were listening in when he unguardedly defended Italian aggression in Abyssinia to a group of British newsmen. By the same token, it was considered irresponsible for the *Daily Chronicle*, "a British newspaper of standing", to criticize Mussolini in 1926. Boundaries, imprecise to contemporaries, may be drawn more clearly with the benefit of extended hindsight.

Taylor's assessment of Simon, who slithered through the Foreign Office before its temporary transformation into a Garden of Eden, is no less persuasive for its predictability. His

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reassessment of Lord Lloyd, who chaired the British Council with pro-consular authority, is more original and especially illuminating. Characterizations of certain minor participants in these proceedings are inevitably open to interpretation. Kennedy Jones, for example, has been called many things, but rarely a "distinguished journalist".

It was not always evident to what threat, real or imagined, British publicists and propagandists felt obliged to respond. Late in the day, Herbert Morrison spoke of "certain foreign governments" whose misrepresentations demanded correction. Others, curlier on, were still more oblique. At times the potential enemy seems to have been Italy; at other times, France, Egyptian nationalists, American isolationists, or South American protectionists. Only towards the end of this twenty-year period was Germany publicly acknowledged to pose a danger. Taylor conveys a vivid sense of mounting and broadening British unease, but does not undertake to evaluate its justification. Consequently, many of the rhetorical appeals by Tallents, Willert, and particularly Vansittart imply a varying degree of paranoia or H. G. Wellsian fantasy, which is surely not the impression that Taylor means to create.

At the outset, it remains debatable whether the "supremacy" of British propaganda in the First World War was as absolute as Taylor posits: Hitler attested that it was, but Northcliffe was uncharacteristically diffident on this score. At the climax, it may be seriously questioned whether Munich was the watershed that Taylor makes out. Edward Hale, a respected Treasury official, stated the view that an intensi-

fication of "the propaganda race" would mean German resentment and imperil the peace with honour that Chamberlain had brought home. Campbell Stuart, known about Fleet Street as "The Wangler", recalled the instructions he received "to suspend any operations" at Eileira House after the Munich Pact. Such testimony is difficult to reconcile with Taylor's convoluted conclusion that "Munich... above all, provided the much-needed stimulant to the gradual process of erosion which had been taking place upon official prejudice against British peacetime involvement in propaganda abroad since the end of the First World War". More emphatically, the subsequent German invasion of Prague "was to provide the necessary impetus to urgency and realism" in the event. Hitler was the best possible propagandist for the British side. Yet not even he could shake Eire from its stand of neutrality or temper the anglophobic many Irish-Americans.

Philip M. Taylor has tackled a complex and fascinating subject. While his reach may exceed his grasp, he has none the less provided an abundance of insights, all suitably disquieting. Not least, he has demonstrated the recurrent need for Britain to project herself not for purposes of self-glorification, but for communicating an abiding commitment to humanitarian values. Experience has shown that cutbacks in the beleaguered staffs of British information agencies, the near-obliteration of the British Council, and the drastic curtailment of transmission by the BBC external services are not likely to assist in the difficult task of winning friends and influencing people.

Pro the proletariat

By Douglas Johnson

MADELINE REBERIOUX and JEAN-PIERRE RIOUX (Editors).
Jaurès et la classe ouvrière.
237pp. Paris: Editions du Vieux.

This volume, which has been edited by Madeleine ReberioUX and Jean-Pierre Rioux, is a record of the discussions organized by the Société d'Etudes Jaurésiennes which took place in November 1976. In the five years which have elapsed since then, it is natural that certain of those present have further developed their ideas, and like Olan Mario Bravo, with his analysis of Jaurès's interpretation of the *Communist Manifesto*, published them in more detailed versions elsewhere. But since studies on Jaurès have tended to concentrate upon the theoretical aspects of his socialism rather than its more practical implications, this collection remains important.

Many of the themes have hardly been explored before, possibly because they present considerable difficulties. Jaurès was slow to clarify his ideas, and because he was anxious to avoid being unjust to one section of the population while being ready to express sympathy for another, his views often appear to be vague, enveloped in rhetoric, hedged around with prudent qualifications. Another difficulty arises from the large number of articles which he published in *La Petite République*, *L'Humanité*, and many local papers. It is easy to fall into the trap of quotation-swapping, which makes his political views appear more extensive than they really were.

The aim of many of these contributors is to show that, in spite of these apparent confusions and hesitations, and in spite of the empirical approach which characterized his whole career, Jaurès developed firm and consistent ideas on the action which socialists should take. Roland Trémpe, in her examination of his view of strikes, recalls how in 1896 he leapt on to the table at a banquet at Albi and sang the "Carmagnole", an action which shocked "la bonne société". He had become a leader of the proletariat rather than an intellectual with certain views. It was she believes, Jaurès's experience of the strike weapon which had effected this transformation. He was always in favour of the right to strike and

the right to demonstrate and saw both the advantage and the necessity of strike action. Madeleine ReberioUX, in her discussion of Jaurès and the working class (she explains that it was only after 1893 that he referred to "la classe ouvrière" rather than to "les classes ouvrières"), shows how he consistently feared the isolation of the proletariat and was in favour of alliances with other classes which would further the triumph of socialism.

Perhaps the most original of the contributions, that by Maurice Agulhon, deals not so much with the principles elaborated by Jaurès himself, but rather with the reputation which he left behind. Considering some twenty-seven statues which existed in his places by 1940 (when those made of metal were removed and melted down), Agulhon suggests that it was Jaurès the enemy of war who was being commemorated and not Jaurès the socialist. At an inauguration ceremony held in 1921, in the small town of Cranaac, the local schoolteacher played his part by shouting "A bas la guerre! Vive la Révolution!" When faced with this scandalous behaviour, he readily admitted having said the former, but denied having spoken in favour of revolution (which did not prevent him from being transferred to another part of the Aveyron department). On those occasions when the statue of Jaurès has been desecrated, it is always the internationalist and pacifist who has aroused the wrath of the nationalists, not the believer in socialism.

Perhaps the study of Jaurès's political image, which is discussed here by Robert Estivals, will show an entirely different reputation. When people had a picture postcard of Jaurès on their table, sometimes framed, and sometimes accompanied by a photograph of a local political leader, it was Maximalism, then it seems clear that it was Jaurès, the socialist, who was being commemorated. Does this mean that for individuals Jaurès was remembered as a believer in socialism, while for the community he remained an opponent of war? When one learns that Clemont-Ferrand only put up its monument to Jaurès in order to keep up with Saint-Etienne, then one grows wary of generalizations. Agulhon is the first to counsel caution, and in this he is in full accord with his colleagues who have contributed to this scholarly and valuable volume.



This drawing by Louis Wain, "The Cats' Tea Party", is included in a sale of English drawings and watercolours at Christie's, 8 King St, London SW1 on October 20. Wain (1860-1939) achieved great popular success with his drawings of cats, but his life was beset with misfortune. His wife died of cancer within two years of their marriage, he lost all his savings in the promotion of a new form of oil lamp and, in 1923, he was certified insane. He was placed in the mental hospital which had housed the parrot painter Richard Dadd, where his pictures of cats became wild abstract patterns of feline colour.

The machiavellian model

By Patrick McCarthy

GIULIO ANDREOTTI.
Diari 1976-1979.
Gli anni della solidarietà.
376pp. Milan: Rizzoli. L.11.00.

One opens Giulio Andreotti's *Diari 1976-1979* with enormous anticipation. These were eventful years when Italy suffered the delayed effects of the economic slump which resulted from the 1973 increase in oil prices, and when the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) had great influence over the government. Much fuss has been made recently about the fact that the PCI was able, after the 1976 elections when its share of the vote went up to 34 per cent, to make and break Italian governments.

The three men who dominated during these years were the Democrazia Cristiana (DC) president Aldo Moro, the PCI secretary Enrico Berlinguer, and Andreotti, who was prime minister. Leonardo Sciascia once called Andreotti "machiavellian", a term which he has inherited from the Roman emperor. But, whether or not he is a likable man, Andreotti is a superbly intelligent and a grandmaster in the chess-game of Italian politics. He began during the Fascist period as president of the Catholic student federation and was (taken up by Alcide de Gasperi, when Moro, an equally subtle grand-master, organized the Christian Democrat-Socialist coalition in the early 1960s, Andreotti, who was then on the DC right, opposed him. But this did not prevent the two men from forming an alliance in 1976. Moro's role was to convince the reluctant, feuding Christian Democrats that they must reach an agreement with the Communists. Andreotti with his ties to the Vatican - he was a personal friend of Pope Paul VI whom he had known since his student days - was the ideal man to reassure the DC and the Church, while heading a government where the Communists were and were not present.

Since this seems to be material for a fascinating book one is all the more disappointed to discover that Andreotti has elected to tell us so little. Long pages about his conversations with other world leaders, described as "fruitful", although the fruits are nowhere apparent, justify with tantalizingly brief and irritatingly life-like comments about how he ran the government. Men as intriguing as Berlinguer and Pope Paul are transformed into shadows as grey as Andreotti himself. When his colleagues, together with the story of these years, need need not help from this dreary, ingenuously diary. Indeed this only interesting question it raises is why Andreotti chose to publish it.

Why did this formidable man steeped in Italian history and culture decide to write such a banal book?

One's first task, however, is to retrace the achievements of Andreotti the prime minister from the deadly prose of Andreotti the diarist. After the 1976 elections he formed a Christian Democrat government and won from the Communists a pledge that they would not vote against it. They adopted a stance of "non-sfiducia" - a wonderful word that means "no-confidence". In June 1977, the role of the Communists and of the other parties of the "non-sfiducia" was increased when it was agreed that a policy of meetings between the secretaries of the parties and the government. In March 1978, Berlinguer took yet another step towards the historical compromise: the Communists still had no ministries but they entered the governmental majority.

This was, however, the high point of their influence because on the day the new government was installed the Red Brigades kidnapped Aldo Moro precisely in order to block the DC-PCI agreement. Without Moro, Andreotti could not prevent the Christian Democrats from shifting to the right and his government lost prestige as it failed to defeat the Red Brigades.

Andreotti's great achievement was to avert economic disaster. He stabilized the lira, reduced inflation to 12 per cent in 1978 and sent the balance of payments into the black. None of this would have been possible without the Communists, who were able to moderate the union's wage demands. Indeed one cannot help feeling that these Communist-backed Andreotti governments served Italy better than the Cossiga and Forlani governments which followed them.

This view was not shared by the Carter administration, which issued a statement in January 1978 opposing the spread of Communist influence. Andreotti's diary comes briefly to life when he denounces this statement as "naïve and inappropriate" and claims that he had as much to do with the American ambassador, Richard Gardner. One might wonder whether he was really so displeased. Neither he nor Moro shared Berlinguer's vision of a historic compromise between Communists and Catholics which would lead to a socialist Italy. Their strategy was to use the PCI in order to preserve Christian Democratic hegemony. The American attitude, which placed an extra bandage on the Communists, may well have suited them.

By the autumn of 1978, the DC-PCI agreement was breaking down. The Communists discovered that their militants, who loathed the DC, were deserting them and that their voters were disappointed by the slow pace of social reform. Berlinguer was paying the price for being in the government without having governmental power. A series of dis-

putes about the appointment of men to the top posts in the public sector and a wave of strikes that resembled the English strikes of December 1978 led to a graver quarrel about the European Monetary System. The DC demanded that Italy enter immediately, while the PCI was afraid this would mean further deflation. When Andreotti opted for entry the Communists withdrew from the government majority and the government collapsed. In the ensuing election of June 1979 the DC held its share of the vote whereas the PCI declined to 30 per cent. Andreotti had served his party well.

One may now tackle the question of why he chose to publish this book. Subtitled "The years of Solidarity", it is a bland, over-simplified defence of the DC-PCI agreement. Andreotti says nothing of the byzantine negotiations which had to be conducted each day if his government was to survive. Instead he heaps praise on the Communists for their responsible role in economic policy and their pro-Western stance in foreign affairs. These years are implicitly contrasted with the post-1979 period, when inflation has soared and the lira has declined. Andreotti's aim is surely to prepare the way for another DC-PCI government. And who better to lead it than Giulio Andreotti?

At the moment this seems unlikely. Andreotti is in the minority of his own party, where the anti-communist group has triumphed. Berlinguer has led the PCI into opposition, he no longer talks about Eurocommunism or the historic compromise and his personal prestige has suffered. The failure of his strategy, the lay centrist Giovanni Spadolini has become the first non-Christian Democrat prime minister in thirty years, while the Socialists have made a come-back and are trying to play a pivotal role between the PCI and the DC. But the PCI still feels that its vocation is to be a party of government and the increasingly confused DC has no other leader of Andreotti's stature. In the closing pages of his diary Andreotti attacks the Socialist leader Benedetto Craxi, clearly hinting that Berlinguer would be a better ally for the DC. One hopes that one has seen the last of Andreotti the diarist but Andreotti the politician is alive and kicking. One may be sure that he is even now plotting the complex moves that may enable him to return to power.

Diana Pinto is the editor of *Contemporary Italian Sociology*, a recently published collection of essays from Italian sources. (233pp. Cambridge University Press. £20.00 521 23738 6; paperback, £7.50). The anthology is divided into four principal sections covering "The Labour Market", "Social Classes", "Social Actors and Politics" and "Dualism, the Welfare State and Market Economy". It also includes an Introduction and biographical notes on the authors.

BIOGRAPHY

DORE ASHTON and DENISE BROWNE
HARE:
Rosa Bonheur
A Life and a Legend
206pp. Seeker and Warburg. £9.95.
0 436 02170 6

Abroad, in provincial cities, indolent and homesick, yawning in the quiet of a grey afternoon, one turns, as ever, to the museum. When one is in this mood great masterpieces no longer serve their purpose; they are too important, too strenuous; they belong to a world outside one's own. From long experience one learns to avoid the crowd which says *Ecole française XIXe siècle*, and there on the attic floor, ignored by a somnolent attendant, are those faithful and sturdy mediocrities whose confidence, unattenuated by years of public neglect, will somehow shoulder one through until tea-time. Jules Dupré, Léon Cogniet, Félix Ziem, Rosa Bonheur: no artistic claims can be made for them. Their terrible colours, glistening crasse, insistent respectability, infinite tedium, represent some ancient moment of repose, before the long march of modern art to begin. They match one's nostalgia for simple rules, simple illustrations, simple things were never simpler: they were at all times complex and sad.

Nostalgia for idealized simplicity is one of the oldest virtues of a civilized society. Scholars in America are turning from Monet to Gérôme, from Cézanne to Decamps, from Gauguin to Rosa Bonheur. There are many spurious justifications for such scholarly activity. One might, for example, argue that there are no up-to-date standard works, that one cannot ignore public taste, that time has come for such artists to be rediscovered. Visitors to the Second Empire exhibition at the Grand Palais in 1979, where crowds gazed in wonder at the portraits of Winnetka, nevertheless found that such works had no staying power. Elevated to rank to which they could never have aspired in their own lifetime - the scholarly monograph, the major retrospective - the Dubouffes and the Coutures and the Desilles failed to make their mark. They do better in the dusty corridors of provincial museums, those Pères Lachaise of the respectable dead, the harmless, the unassuming, the forgotten. There, on the appropriate afternoon, the traveller, his timespan rendered infinite by the absence of family landmarks, may savor for a while the beguiling and misleading placidity of certain areas of the nineteenth century.

I hesitate to "research" how many PhD students there are at present tunnelling down these byways, although an hour with a computer would reveal all. I remember that last year Professor Albert Boime devoted 683 pages to Thomas Couture, and that his book was a very handsome production: the artist, however, remains dim. In the same year Horace Vernet was given an exhibition in Rome and Ary Scheffer one in Paris; on reflection, they were revealed as rather worse than one remembered them. Oscar Wilde could not appreciate all works of art as an auctioneer. We would do well to recognize the separateness of images - our nostalgia for a past we never knew. They are not the same.

In the meantime, Rosa Bonheur, horse painter extraordinaire, has been honoured with a biography, the first for seventy years. In addition to being a painter of international, if ephemeral, repute, she was a liberated woman, although whether she thought so herself is another matter and no doubt belongs in another book. Dore Ashton is too good an art historian and, to judge by the illustrations in the present volume, Denise Browne Hare too good a photographer to try to mediate the truth here. Simply that Rosa Bonheur, who painted perhaps two

Ploughing a provincial furrow

By Anita Brookner

pictures of renown, "The Horse Fair" and "Ploughing in the Nivernais" is mainly remembered for the fact that she dressed as a man, that she assumed a Leshian nickname with Nathalie Micas, and after the latter's death, with Anna Elizabeth Klumpke, and that she bought and lived in a potentially exquisite manor house on the edge of the Forest of Fontainebleau which she transformed into a menagerie, heads of stuffed elk and reindeer thrusting out from the walls of the salon to contemplate the collection of goats, horses, furry sheep, two lions, innumerable dogs, and a yak, all of which were encouraged to wander through the house. Over this domain Rosa Bonheur reigned supreme, her impressive first, short hair, and bluff senatorial features well known in the vicinity and apparently accepted without criticism. While she drew and painted her animals, and occasionally shot them, Nathalie Micas rested from her household labours by inventing a new type of brake for a steam engine. This she was unable to test and it can be assumed to have failed.

Rosa Bonheur was one of the unfortunate children of Raimond Bonheur, painter and enthusiast, and of his wife Sophie. On his arrival in Paris in 1828 Raimond Bonheur became enraptured by the ideal of universal brotherhood then being propagated by the Saint-Simonians, and dedicating himself to the betterment of humanity, he left his wife to support the family by taking in needlework. He seems to have been a madman, drunk on the empty words and gestures put about by Enfantin and becoming a member of his monastery at Ménilmontant, where his wife and children were permitted to visit him, until it was closed down by the government. Raimond Bonheur was also a fearful man with a penchant for dressing up: the child Rosa was frequently accosted as a Templar, and Corot painted her wearing a large plumed hat with her infant smock. After Sophie Bonheur had wasted away and died, Rosa Bonheur, wisely in the circumstances, decided to transfer her affections to the animal kingdom. Trained in the rudiments of drawing by her father, and possibly stimulated by the lectures of Geoffroy de Saint-Hilaire, who stressed that anatomical organisms are basically analogous, any differences being metamorphic variations of an original type or pattern, Rosa donned breeches and a painter's jacket, and, after a brief period of copying in the Louvre, went to study her special subject in the abattoirs and in the dissection benches in her father's studio. She began to exhibit in the Salon of 1840, when she was nineteen, and from that moment was very successful, enjoying her greatest acclaim with "The Horse Fair" of 1853, a five metre long canvas now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York and described laudably by John Rewald as "a majestic exercise in futile dexterity".

It does not in fact wear too badly. It is based on a composition by Horace Vernet of 1827, which is in its turn based on Géricault's studies for "The Riderless Horse Race" of 1817, which in their turn derive from casts of the Parthenon frieze made by the sculptor G. Girard in London and kept in his studio in Rome. By the time the pattern has come to rest with Rosa Bonheur, a certain Second Empire domestication has set in: the horses are percherons, they trot rather than rear, and the horse traders are kitted out in caps and waistcoats and full moustaches. Yet the heroic element is still there, evoked by the evidence in the helped out in this instance by those haphazard features that sometimes make a composition memorable: a diagonal barrier of trees, a patterning of patches of blue across the canvas, rather than red, and the horse traders are kitted out in caps and waistcoats and full moustaches. 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He who plays the prince

By Jeremy Treglown

JOHN OSBORNE:
A Better Class of Person
An Autobiography: 1929-1956
285pp. Faber and Faber. £7.95
0 571 11785 6

One of the funny episodes in this often very funny book concerns John Osborne's brief spell as the actor-manager of a company in the Victoria Theatre, Hayling Island. It was the summer of 1950, and while the twenty-one-year-old Osborne's half-envious, half-despised contemporaries at university were struggling through their finals, he had already put behind him a promising journalistic career on the trade paper *Gas World* and had progressed from working as a stage-hand and understudy at theatres in Kidderminster, Sunderland and elsewhere to seeing *The Devil Inside*, a play he had written with his actress "mistress" Stella Calder, performed at the Theatre Royal, Huddersfield.

Now he was in the Saga Repertory Company, and had helped organize its move from the end of the pier at Ilfracombe - where the actors had been living in a dilapidated Edwardian hotel run by a pair of homosexuals, each liable to turn up in Osborne's bedroom in the middle of the night - to the wind-kissed isthmus near Portsmouth. With £1,000 from an unworried backer, and a cast recruited straight out of drama school (a good subject for Osborne's derision: "snoopy amateurism... mining theorizing... I had to teach them to clean up a flat and adjust a counterweight"), they began the season in *Springtime for Henry* and *Night Must Fall*. All summer they did well with an audience of refugees from the adjacent holiday camp and people sheltering from the weather. When September came, though, the holidaymakers departed and business dropped. Adopting the only course known to provincial managers in such circumstances during school terms, Osborne put on a set text: *Hamlet*. He cut the four-hour play by about half while leaving in most of the best bits spoken by the Prince, whom, naturally, he played himself.

In *A Better Class of Person* as elsewhere, Osborne is pathologically defensive ("offensive" is more like it) about his writing; but few actors can have been so hilariously self-critical. He says he saw the part chiefly as an opportunity to taunt and mock the drama-school actresses, particularly his Gertrude: "I mauled her as lowly as her costume allowed... As a Hamlet, it was a passable impersonation of Claudius after a night's carousing... the Osborne Prince, a leering milk-roundsman of Deamark Hill". The other actors' lines, such as were left, passed him by, unnoticed: "They were interruptions of a huge euphoria I was certain never to be allowed again".

He was wrong, of course. Many of his plays in one way or another were to re-enact that solo performance: not only the one-man five-hander *Look Back in Anger*, or *Inadmissible Evidence*, all of which happens in Bill Maitland's mind (it's interesting that Nicol Williamson, who did Maitland, went on to play a Hamlet rather like the one Osborne describes), or *Watch It Come Down*, with its matted-up anti-hero who dies at the end, but even *Went of Suez*. The play has a bravura scene in which the old writer Wyatt, first played by Ralph Richardson, is interviewed by a reporter. It's an opportunity, like Osborne's Hamlet, for thinly disguised soliloquy. The questions don't matter, so little so indeed, that at the performance I saw on tour, when the interviewer was slightly late on cue, Richardson simply ran on from his last answer to the next, seeing the irony on the actress's face he paused and boldly improvised with me, remembering "I know what you're going to ask, and it's absolute rot".

Most of Osborne's chief characters know, without listening, what the others are going to say and think it's rot. And many of them, including Wyatt, are preoccupied like Hamlet with their fathers' deaths. Nature's common theme, Chaucer says, is the death of fathers: it's certainly Osborne's common theme, and not surprisingly. His own father was tubercular and spent most of his son's childhood dying. May 8 is a memorable date to Osborne less because it is when *Look Back in Anger* was first performed at the Royal Court in 1956 than because it was Thomas Osborne's birthday. *A Better Class of Person* begins with this coincidence (the book ends just before *Look Back* was put on), and the first pages movingly recall Mr Osborne's departure in 1936 to a sanatorium in Menton, and what he looked like:

He had the whitest hands I have ever seen; Shullimor hands he called them. (Pale hands I love beside the Lethic waters' of Shullimor. It was one of the favourite Sunley ballads.) The fingers were very long and, in contrast to the whiteness of the rest of the hand, the tips of every one were stained burnt ochre from years of Players Pleading. His suit - as I remember he had only one, blue-striped suit - was usually unpressed but he was meticulous about the state of his cuffs and particularly his collars. The rest of his costume was unvariable: a rather grey bowler hat and a msc which, on his insistence, was never sent to the cleaners although my mother once threw it, to his distress, into the dustbin. The edges of the collar and sleeves were an ingrained, shiny, mourning black, but his papery shoes were always brightly polished. In all, he must have seemed a little like a Welsh-sounding, purulent, reticent investigator of sorts from a snail provincial town.

Osborne's Luther, at the end of the play about him, says "It's hard to accept you're anyone's son, and you're not the father of yourself." But for Osborne himself the opposite seems to have been true: that he nceptually being a son all the more passionately for the fact that he was steadily being deprived of his father, and that it was partly through this deprivation that he arrived at his own personality - a personality revelled in here, like in the plays, as heterosexual to the point of misogyny, and one fascinated by the tastes and attitudes of his father's generation. He tells us he collected old numbers of the *Magnet* and the *Gen* from the period of Mr Osborne's own childhood, and among current comics "had a fondness for *Chips*, a pink beloved of my father".

One day early in 1940, he heard his mother scream from the bottom of the stairs.

I ran to see what was happening and started up to the landing where my father was standing. He was completely naked with his silver hair and grey, black and red beard. He looked like a naked Christ. "Look at him!" he screamed. "Oh, my God, he's gone blind." He stood quite still for a moment and then fell headlong down the stairs on top of us. Between us we carried him upstairs. She was right. He had gone blind.

A few years after his father's death, and with what feelings, does not follow. John Osborne went into, to his number seven for his minor-not public school against "the fathers". Together with M. Bird, the school magazine reported, in a passage quoted here without comment, "Osborne put up a fine stand at the wicket, scoring 19, and enabling the school to draw."

The book is included among many other oddities, scattered through the autobiography, making it a

rid between a memoir and a commonplace book. The form does not always work well. Some of the commonplace are too commonplace, letters are sometimes quoted too numerous, the quotations Osborne includes from his own plays are not all unimpressive, and there are occasions, particularly later in the book, when the scrapbook interpolations are printed uncomfortably close to passages of scrappiness in the memoirs proper, which are distinctly uneven in their writing.

This is the kind of criticism which gets people threatened with at least violent death by Osborne, who describes his own stance - he is precisely half-correct - as "bellicose defeatism". He's not, he makes clear to those who didn't know already, a man to miss letting the sun go down on his wrath: he has always looked forward in anger. One of the members of the Ilfrcombe company was Lynne Reid Banks. Osborne tells us he "suck" a nose for such women (the "such" is unrelated to any specific complaint). She was "unspeakable". Some time afterwards, he re-lates, at a smart party in London, he offered her a sandwich in which "I had taken some trouble to insert among the smoked salmon and cream cheese, like a worm in the bud, a used French letter". Serve her right! Let me make clear at once both that I shall always take my own sandwiches to parties from now on, just in case, and that anyway I found *A Better Class of Person* absorbing, hilarious and often touching. The scrappy bits are only the least successful aspect of Osborne's otherwise effective rejection of traditional autobiography's factitious shapeliness.

Osborne has always insisted that life is a mess, and certainly his own upbringing was extravagantly untidy. His parents were often separated, by violent quarrels as well as by his father's illness. Partly because of his mother's extreme restlessness, partly because of the war and partly because of the economic consequences of his father's death, he was moved from one suburban house or flat or forty times in his first seventeen years, he calculates, and from one school to another until his arrival at St Michael's College, a boarding school evacuated from north London to Devon. There is no plot to his autobiography, little development and not much action, either. But there are plenty of marvellous characters, and the scenery is very well done.

The scenes are stock English Provincial: not only Kidderminster and Hayling Island but his early days of the Fulham Palace Road ("Victorian terraced houses with strange little gnarled cigar stoves of trees lining the pavements"), or on a housing estate on the way to Reigate, or in the Isle of Wight. It all contrasts with the sadly exotic landscape of his father's life: the sanatorium at Menton, and above all a sea trip to Cape Town he won at the age of twelve in a *Dolly* Mail drawing competition, but never completed; his eldest gave out, off Portugal; he was sent ashore for a period in hospital and shipped home with a bill of several hundred pounds.

Mr Osborne's mother never let him forget this expense, and indeed exacted it from his meagre estate thirty years later. Grandma Osborne is one of the leading characters in the book, a focus for and perhaps a chief cause of John Osborne's misogyny and his contempt for emotional ineptness. She represented, he says in a particularly memorable section of the book, "a cloth at its most detached pebble-dash house in Clanton Close". Osborne remembers names as if they were personal insults: she kept her unemployed husband standing in the kitchen until him his small shopping list, which constituted his banishment for the rest of the morning. Every afternoon, after "Early Dinner", she sent



John Osborne in rep at Kidderminster - from the book reviewed here.

him upstairs for his sleep, while she dozed in an armchair to be woken soon after four by the tea he had prepared. Their routines fill page after page of writing so detailed and so alert that its scorn - as always in Osborne's best work - is clearly also a kind of love. Routine was something he didn't have much of himself.

He had plenty of variety and colour to make up for it, though, and not only by contrast with the pallor of the elder Osbornes, but by his energetic, shabby-vivid comic pathos family life so well depicted in *The Entertainer* more than for anything they "did", that Osborne's relations are observed and remembered so keenly and, it is made to seem, so effortlessly - the narrative moving lightly from one uncompromising character-sketch to another, through his ramifying family, his school friends and girlfriends, and on to the theatrical queens and prissy actresses of the later parts of the book: parts in which he badly hurts people who love him and is badly hurt by people he loves, and manages to write about both processes and their permutations with a degree of self-criticism and pleasant lack of rancour.

In *Watch It Come Down*, Ben says "You need more than a resentful memory to be a writer." Osborne has a fair amount to resent in his memories, and bitterness and scorn are neither absent from this book nor by any means always bad for it. But what is most striking is its predominantly good-humoured and relaxed vividness. No one with any grasp of the plays could suppose they were written by someone who wasn't affectionate and witty, as well as self-indulgent and biliously vain. But the memoirs cooey an author who is a Better Class of Person than he has previously let the public know.

LEO LOWENTHAL.
Schriften II: Das bürgerliche Bewusstsein in der Literatur
447pp. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
3 518 06506 8

This second volume of Löwenthal's collected writings, consists of a series of studies of modern literature from the Spanish and French classics, Shakespeare and Goethe to Ibsen, Strindberg and Knut Hamsun; and another series, devoted to German nineteenth-century novelists. The former are mostly post-war and were originally written in English; the latter date from before the emigration, but were not published till 1971. The celebrated Hamsun essay, which anticipated the Norwegian's avowal of fascism by six years, is reprinted in its original form; this editorial

Daniel Johnston

Born of frustration

By Edwin Morgan

EUGENIO MONTALE:
Altri versi e poesie disperse
195pp. Milan: Mondadori. L.12000.
8 80 020212 7

Eugenio Montale, who died in Milan on September 12 at the age of eighty-four was surely the greatest, though not the easiest, of modern Italian poets. His reputation would seem secure, with the possible qualification that if the long poem returned as a favoured form, as opposed to short poems and sequences, he might be denied major status, or even be neglected, much as Donne was by the Augustans. But Montale's short poems have such intensity, are so highly charged with meaning as well as with strong and complex musical and linguistic effects, that the minor seems to encapsulate the major. If major status requires some broad generalizing power, an ability to sweep the mind through human society and the world of ideas - in the sense in which Wordsworth is the last major English poet - then Montale may be thought to fall short; on the other hand, his very fragmentariness, his obliquities and epiphanies, his sombrely unpretentious questioning of nature and fate, may well be the real and perfectly defensible equivalent, for our time, of earlier obliquities and stances.

It will long be argued, of course, how much of the enigmatic or difficult or "hermetic" aspect of Montale's poetry is owed to his own psychology, and how much to the pressures of the times he lived in, and particularly the 1920s and 1930s when his poetry was at its sharpest and most moving. Some great, almost scorpion-like frustration certainly pervades his earlier verse and emerges with unmatched force in his poems about the sea:

O arid aisles of air
I now drift,
an agave clinging in a cleft
of the cliff,
stunning, like the arms of seaweed, the
which arches awful jaws and jars the
rocks:
and in this ferment
of all substances, with the tight-shut buds
of my thoughts
unable to burst any more,
I feel the
garment
of my immobility laid on me today like a
torment.

Whether, as Giuliano Deigo has suggested, the key is to be found in a suppressed homosexuality ("the track of one path taken, the other solicited by my heart"), or whether the co-vergence in Italy of literary futurism and political fascism led him to despair of any self-fulfilment other than being able to speak "of a faith that was often invaded, of a hope that burned more slowly than a sub-born log in the fire", or indeed whether the causes are an indefinable mix of man and time and place, it is certainly an excellent paradox of the creative process that so much of the Montalian unness and sense of barriers and checks issued in a poetry of force and authority.

Comparison has often been made with Leopardi, and it is true that both poets start from a conviction of the difficulty of happiness, and both, in a wider sense, have been called pessimists. But pessimism is an ambiguous and problematic word to a poet: the very act or fact of artistic creativity summons up energies which are in direct conflict with pessimism, even while they may be devoted to expressing such beliefs, and Leopardi at his blackest can be positively exhilarating to read. Montale's pessimism, which in any case is not so thoroughgoing as Leopardi's, stands in need of some qualification. There is a humanity and

tenderness in many of his poems, often diffused through the lightness of a few glancing details but none the less touching for that. One thinks of the beautiful awareness of precarious youth in the image of the girls with their brimming shouldered pitchers in "Sarcophagi", or Dora Markus with her restless memories and yesmings, or even the hedged hogs which come out at the end of "Notizie dall'Amista" and "slake their thirst at a thread of pity".

Something else which makes for assertion and presence in Montale's poetry, rather than absence or destruction, is his very considerable verbal power to evoke landscape, weather, atmosphere, "place" in general. Rocks and waves, wind and sun, rain and mist, trees, birds, animals, insects - to say nothing of streets and buildings, stone and glass - are caught and fixed with such vividness that they are far more than a backdrop for human activity: they stir us and speak to us with their own energetic life:

The sky drips quivering, the soil steams
as it thinks,
and you and the world around you are
flooded and swirled
with the limp flapping of awnings and the
gigantic sheets
of sodden shapes
of whispering rain and the blown-down
paper lanterns scraping through the
streets.
(Arsenio)

It is not surprising, in this context, that in "L'anguille" the eel is chosen as a symbolic representative of endlessly thrusting and self-renewing life, its thousand-mile sea-journeys making it "the brand, the lash, the shaft of Love on earth".

Although some of the early poetry has difficulties and densities where severe knots of feeling and experience are still uncomfortably unresolved, there is little doubt that his most notable work comes from those volumes - *Ossi di seppia* (1925), *Le occasioni* (1939), and *La bufera e*

altro (1956). When he again began publishing in book form, after a long break, a different kind of poetry emerged in *Satura* (1971), *Diario del '91 e del '72* (1973) and *Quindici di quattro anni* (1977). The texture is lighter, the syntax is clearer, the vocabulary is more straightforward, and the poems are frequently occasional, and often witty and satirical; even in the fine elegiac sequence devoted to his dead wife, the spareness and transparency of the writing are in striking contrast to the tense compression of *Le occasioni*. Now his work is completed with the publication of *Altri versi*.

Those lucky enough to possess the very handsome but very expensive *L'opera in versi*, the virtually complete collection of his poetry published by Einaudi in 1980, carefully edited by Rosanna Bettarini and Gianfranco Contini, need not rush to buy *Altri versi* unless they are anxious to see the five short pieces it adds to the Einaudi collection, only one of which (an early draft, in French, of "Carnale di Gerli" from *Le occasioni*) has any special interest. Apart from these five poems, *Altri versi* simply reprints (and acknowledges) the Einaudi text, omitting its textual apparatus and eschewing its device of smaller type for poems which Montale had himself rejected from the canon. The contents are a mixed bag: unpublished poems from the period following *Quindici di quattro anni*, and uncollected or unpublished poems from later (1960-1977) and earlier (1916-1928) years. The early poems very clearly come from the author of *Ossi di seppia*, though only two or three of them have real distinction. There are some characteristically haunting images: the world at evening like a huge bubble of crystal; walking down a path to the sea, through tangles of blackthorn, guided by a butterfly; "un murmure d'irrequieta marina"; clamour of boys mingling with chatter of spar-

rows; and much sign of the old Montalian malaise - "un giorno d'oscura noia", "l'orrore di vivere sale a gola", "il cammino è sempre da ricominciare". The most interesting and rewarding poem is a longish lyrical meditation, "Lettera levantina" (1923), which ends with a fine Antonioniesque film-shot as the speaker imagines

that you are still there,
if indeed far off, in this exhausted day
which ends without apothosis;
and that we can stare together
through the breakers and the thick
mists
at the reefs of the Cinqueterre
as they whiten, whipped by the spray.

The later poems are largely occasional, and some of them are very slight, mere notes and jottings and epigrams, on God and the Devil, on time and space, on Hegel, on Nietzsche, on the Big Bang, on human origins, on popes and saints, on the third world war, on Sunni and Shia, on the non-writing of poetry on Jupiter. The lines are peppered with foreign words - English, French, German, Spanish - which tend to give a rather brittle, mocking, cosmopolitan tone. The best of the poems are either the longer contemporary satires, like the rich and grisly "Nion a Roma" (1969); or some charmingly personal, "late-period" Pasternakian thoughts on fame and time, like "Alunna delle Muse" (1980); or (perhaps best of all) some moving reminiscence, like that of the old woman in "Una visitatrice" (1979) whom as a boy he feared and disliked, though his father used to slip her some money from time to time, and whom he never saw again but often thinks of - she reminds him now of "the pain of the world", and of the mysterious unknown web of human relationships. In poems like these, the move towards clarity and simplicity presents its justification, even if the earlier work retains a more profound, more original and disturbing power.

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Piercing the many-coloured cloak

By Galen Strawson

MICHEL TOURNIER:
Géminis
452pp. Collins. £8.95.
0 00 221448 2

Invited to speak recently at a conference entitled "L'Actualité de Flaubert", Michel Tournier's position was simple: "L'actualité de Flaubert, c'est moi!" Perhaps he meant only that he was the only contemporary French novelist of Flaubert's stature. Or perhaps he meant more than that, seeing himself as writing in the, or a, Flaubertian tradition. Is that a plausible view? There are some similarities certainly, but these are of a general kind; and underneath the similarities there are differences.

Thus Tournier and Flaubert share — though this is vague — a peculiar authority in their writing. But where Flaubert's prose is a thing laboured and shaped, assembled piece by piece like a mosaic and locked end to end, the character of Tournier's prose, at least, is of something that has flowed, the elegant and syntactically sober periods coming entire to mind.

In both cases, too, there is a delight in, a gift — need — for detail. It is this that Flaubert cumulated in *Salammbô*, with its grotesque and perverse catalogues of wounds and diseases, engines of war and manners of death. In Tournier the fascination with detail is revealed not so much by the concern with such *faits divers* as the 30,733 kilos of ordnance that the city of Roanne produces daily, noted by Alexandre Surin, joint hero of *Les Mémoires*, the novel now translated as *Géminis*. It is revealed, rather, in Tournier's astonishing gift for the exact, comprehensive, and economical description of complicated processes and objects.

But again, whereas in Flaubert the sense of phrases sought, figures and facts, once angles adjusted and engineered, in Tournier the sense is rather one of great ease; of details, *précisions*, plucked and expertly deployed merely *en passant*. Often it seems as if the intricacies of objects — such as the mighty old Jacquard loom in the village where the *Géminis* Jean and Paul grow up — are just written out directly as seen or imagined, converted without labour or depreciation into the currency of language, taken up without effort into the complex play of symbols. And between this another great difference between the two men. Tournier exploits his details ceaselessly and cynically for their symbolic potentialities. Flaubert's details, next to Tournier's, are symbolically inert; he practises with them the art of facts for facts' sake.

But Tournier also has problems with detail. *Vendredi* (1967) reads like a repository of more or less bizarre descriptive *lourds de force*. Included despite the requirements of narrative cogency. The attempts to tie them in do not convince. The same is true of *Géminis*. It is arguably too long by a third. There are ingenious things in the last 150 pages, as Paul, seeking to restore the "genital cell," pursues Jean, who seeks to destroy it, round the world. But the dominant impression, quite apart from the uncomfortable guide-book facts and figures on Venice, Iceland and Japan, is of heterogeneous material, resisting integration into the main body of the book. Tournier is a master of the massively inflated detail, but the concept concerning *névroses* (not the things that fall from the sky — those are meteoroids — but merely those phenomena, hazy fog snow, which are the subject matter of meteorology) salutes in the last third of *Géminis* one of his least successful.

Like *Vendredi*, *Géminis* is a novel of ideas. In that it is a novel devoted primarily to the elaborate and digressive *mise en scène* of particular ideas, to the transmutation of particular whimsical and metaphysical, at once whimsical and metaphysical, into particular conceptual locality. The two books overlap in their concerns and

Géminis contains several references to Robinson Crusoe, the (pointedly un-erudite) hero of *Vendredi*. The principal subject of *Vendredi* is solitude and, obliquely, the nature of our need for others, for human otherness. *Géminis*, constructed like Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* as an irregular cycle of inner discourses by the various characters, develops directly the theme of the Other: of our search and desire, especially in sexual relations, for sameness or difference in others.

But *Géminis* is a novel of ideas not only because it is fiction in the service of speculation, but also because ideas are themselves the true protagonists. They are so because the human protagonists live through ideas. Tournier's exact flights of fancy are not narrative interventions; they are his characters' reflections upon their own and each other's lives. And the real drama of their lives lies not in what befalls them — though this is dramatic enough — but in their compulsive theorizing about what befalls them. Time and again Tournier italicizes a set of his characters to develop a whole series of cross-stitch reflections out of it.

It is in the elaboration of these series of reflections that Tournier shows his greatest skill. Remove the comic aspect, leave only the ingenuity, and they are somewhat like the corruptions of Heath Robinson — they have something of the same felicity. Apparent absurdity turns out upon inspection to be functional in some respect, to have a point; disparate oddments are assembled into sense. A vital feature of Heath Robinson's constructions is that, ex-

amining all the connections, one sees that they really work — after a fashion. That, too, is what distinguishes Tournier's constructions. They work or almost always. He has the French love of paradox, but he is rare among Frenchmen in making his paradoxes fertile, training them up with care and erudition, animating their initial awkwardness with the logic of common sense, making them concrete in the events of his characters' lives.

Sameness and difference in the Other (the capitalization, though not of his conjecturing, but of the importance not only to the homosexual Alexandre Surin, the "dandy king" of good family who inherits from his brother the management of the Urban Refuse Disposal Company (TURDICO) with operations in six cities, but also to his nephews, the identical twins Jean and Paul, possessed as they are of "genemate intuition", bound together by a "cryptophis", a secret language; forming as they do a "genemate cell", a single entity. Jean-Paul, sleeping head to tail, us in the womb, each with his head locked thus in a sexual intercourse passing non-twin understanding, in which the one is the same and yet truly other — the "seminal communion" of mutual irritation.

At the end of a remarkable silent exchange on sameness and otherness, Paul asks for no more than to perpetuate the monogamous propinquity of the geminate cell, the mirroring of their lives together. He rejoices in the sameness of his twin which, precisely by being other, available out

there in the world, permits him to know himself as the twinless never can, to escape entirely the sense of being ultimately alone that to the twinless seems an irremediable feature of the human condition. Jean on the other hand struggles to break out of the Jean-Paul singularity, trying and failing to marry. He seeks otherness. But it's not the sameness of his twin that most afflicts him. Paradoxically, it's the fact that he experiences Paul as "absolute otherness". Distinguished from him by no qualitative characteristic at all, and yet distinct, Paul is distinguished only by personality which halts the twinless gaze is colourless and transparent to geminate eyes, allowing them to see abstract, bare, disconcerting, skeletal, frightening: otherness.

Uncle Alexandre ponders the connected theme of the homosexual as twin. Homosexuality as sameness is treated as if the sexual union were always a problem, one which prompts the search for difference in some other dimension, of build, class, colour, race, and so on. Alexandre at times unattractively aggressive homosexuality is not negatively founded, however, on fear of the other sex. It stems, rather, from positive pleasure in the sexual sameness of the other. "When we know one another with the marvelous understanding that comes of an atavistic, immemorial, and as it were innate awareness of the other's sexual parts".

Sameness and difference, attachment, separation and loss. Tournier offers no general survey of this vast area, but develops highly idiosyn-

cratic positions — those of his characters — deep within it, where complicated insights jostle with sentimental prejudices. The genre is doubtless not to everyone's taste, but Tournier at his best is master at it. In his autobiographical essay *Le vent paradoxal* he praises Gilles Deleuze — they were both members of a youthful philosophical discussion group during the war — for his ability to give concreteness, point and weight to abstract ideas: "les propos que nous échangeons comme balles de coton ou de caoutchouc, il [Deleuze] nous les renvoyait comme boulets de fonte d'acier... toute la philosophie scolaire et éculée passait à travers lui en ressortait méconnaissable, avec un air de fraîcheur, de jeunesse encore digérée, d'après nouveauté". Tournier's distinctive ability is the reverse of this — it is the ability to draw ideas and abstractions out of the concrete and particular. Deleuze's characteristic mode might be said to be that of parable: starting with ideas, he finds memorable concrete images for their expression. Tournier, by contrast, is that of creative exegesis, exegesis of the festive given: starting from the concrete he elaborates ideas from it, deciphering (and inventing) its implications and presuppositions, transforming it in the process.

In so doing he attains of times to the epic; and in a unique fashion. He gives a sense that the realm of ideas is indeed a realm, a place with an objective geography; a geography of epic proportions, rich in fictional possibility; but one that is created, not one that is revealed, and in which what happens is not of one's own choosing.

Cosiness and carnage

By Peter Kemp

WILLIAM TREVOR:
Beyond the Pale
And other stories
256pp. Bodley Head. £6.95.
0 370 03442 X

If the Distressed Gentlefolk's Aid Association has a fiction black-list, William Trevor should be high upon it. From his first novel, *The Old Boys*, onwards, he has specialized in harrowing gentility. His books regularly shepherd into view the well-bred and/or well-heeled: then, unlikenshaped as aggressive predator on them, he depicts with sprightly realism the bleak distress and panic-stricken swervings that ensue.

The clash between herbivores and carnivores fascinates Trevor. His last novel, *Other People's Worlds*, absorbedly watched a psychopath weakening havoc in a nest of gentlefolk. The preceding one, *The Children of Dynanhill*, recorded the tremors shaking rectory and bungalow as a crazy blackmailer harassed the mild citizens of a sleepy Dorset town. Retelling grim pandemonium, the book archly savoured such spectacles as that of a disgraced pederast trying to placate his virgin wife with a cup of Ovaltine.

Trevor's fiction constantly brings together the disruptive and the decorous, the sordid and the sedate. The title of his new book, *Beyond the Pale*, epitomizes his preoccupation with an oasis of propriety beleaguered by viciousness and savagery. Most of the twelve stories in it offer variations on the theme. The opening piece, "The Bedroom Eyes of Mrs Vansittart", focuses — as is so often the procedure — on an initially picturesque scene: here the villas of Cap Ferrat where the "varying styles of architecture have romance and nostalgia in common... Mimosa and pale wistaria add fairy-tale colour". True to form, squalor soon gains entry — in the shape of one of Trevor's fictional stand-bys: a petty blackmailer. Finally, comes the divulging of an ugly secret: the man thought to be an ideal husband is, in fact, another of Trevor's seedy paedophiles.

Clattering through similar routines, other stories also automatically discharge little piles of dirty linen. In "Mulvihill's Memorial", a solidly wholesome-seeming chap — "Given to wearing Harris tweed jackets and looking not unlike an advertisement for the Four Square tobacco he smoked" — is found, after his death, to have been a peeping tom and pornographic film buff (exposures turned up by this cause the usual genteel consternation, including the dropping of an agitated cup of Ovaltine).

"Sunday Drinks" moves into a particularly well-trodden sector of Trevor's fictional territory: so attractive a garden that throws into damning relief the unhealthy gongs-on amidst the flowers and sunshine. As a group of prosperous acquaintances enjoy of *frisco* aperitifs, a theatrically bitchy homosexual — another type Trevor is fond of — circulates with assiduous malice, letting it be known that the guests were not quite as they appeared to be. There is the customary cracking of facades. Frustration leaks distastefully from a divorcee: "Sexual fantasy flooded from her, tired and seeming soiled in the bright sunshine". And a fainting fit reveals that, behind the cheery, chloretic exterior of the central character, there is, "if not a skeleton in the cupboard, at least a ruined, drug-addicted son in a darkened bedroom."

The use of the garden to suggest an Eden which proves to be swarming with snakes is very characteristic of Trevor. Ever since *The Old Boys*, where mangled bird-remains were found amongst suburban antirrhinums, and senile delinquents perpetrated "malicious damage to the wallflower beds" of a residential hotel, this has been so. In *Beyond the Pale*, horticultural metaphors abound. A man commits suicide after pouring out a tale of murder and mutilation under the magnolia of a smart

hotel. Another gets his skull cracked open in a rocky area by a bunch of nursery-finked adults sit around on the lawn with their teddies, surrounded by Beatrix Potter mugs and listening to the record of "The Teddy-Bears' Picnic". A third man comes to believe that his fiancée once murdered a schoolmate by knocking her from a sycamore tree in the lovely garden of the family home, Wistaria Lodge.

The story which recounts this, "The Blue Dress", is especially emphatic in its juxtaposition of the nice and the nasty. The supposed madress, with her immaculate white dress, perfect oval face, fair hair and sky-blue eyes, is the picture of innocence. Around her is a model family. Her brothers are charmingly affectionate. Father is an amiable amateur archaeologist. Mother bends gracefully over her embroidery frame in a drawing-room heaped with delphiniums, roses and sweet-peas (arranging flowers around atrocity is another widespread penchant of Trevor's).

Stressing the polarity which underlies most of his fiction, Trevor declares, "In the sunny room, while marmalade was passed and the flowered china had all the prettiness of a cottage garden, the horror was non-sensical". But "The Blue Dress" aims to be more than just another of his cosiness-and-carnage pieces. Its narrator is an investigative journalist, someone driven to "scratch away the falsehoods". In his mind, the possible cover-up in Wistaria Lodge is linked with other instances of camouflaged enormity — especially in Ulster. He believes "it isn't nice, the truth in Northern Ireland". The most ambitious story here, "Beyond the Pale", starts from this assumption.

The setting is, again, one of gra-

dious affluence: Glencarron Lodge, an exclusive hotel in Co Antrim is "Perfection... quite majestic in its rather elegant way". The central figures are four friends, somewhat reminiscent of the quartet in Furd's *Good Soldier*: "as a kind of unwritten rule we never comment on one another. We're four people who play bridge". All nice people, they regularly holiday at Glencarron Lodge, but live "quite close to Leatherhead" where "On a bridge night there's coffee at nine o'clock with unacrossed or *petits fours*". Predictably, this *petits-fours*-some is soon feeling the strain. The two men — echoing *The Old Boys* — are retardedly obsessed with their public-school days. And, through the customary peep at sexual sleaziness, we learn that one of the women is having an affair with the other's husband, something she recounts with the prim-lipped lubricity of so many Trevor characters: "I was waiting for him, as he likes me to wait, in bed but he didn't wish to speak of love and referred instead to my body".

The use of mealy-mouthed locutions when dealing with sex (spoken of, in these stories, in terms of "congress" or "conjunctures") is common in Trevor. It acts as a verbal equivalent of the counter-pointing of niceness and nastiness which his plots continually effect. Raised eyebrows and pursed lips pore spindulously over gamey behaviour: with the result that, though the fiction makes constant use of sexually *louche* material, it never convincingly portrays it (a supposedly hard-core film in "Mulvihill's Memorial", for instance, is said to feature a woman being "divested" of a "petticoat").

Trying to move from the *News of the World* to the woes of the world,

"Beyond the Pale" shivers its carefully soiled Arcadian with the repercussions of Ulster terrorism. A man who has been involved with a female terrorist kills himself, on the hotel premises. Multiple breakdown follows: psychological collapse, fracturing of etiquette, the crumbling of the proprietors' professional affability, the splitting of the foursome. And through paragraphs of stilted hysteria, the one sympathetic character pronounces the familiar Trevor message about the insubstantiality of niceness: "Chaos and contradiction... were hidden everywhere beneath nice-sounding names", "blood... flowed around those nice-sounding names".

For all its gesturing towards something of larger significance, though, the story remains at the level of the toy shocker. While Trevor seems to have abandoned his earlier habit of labelling characters with joky names — Turle, Sole, Strap, Spanners, Tiles, Batt, Clapp and the like — he still mainly deals in types and caricatures. Only minimally individualized, they can't support the ponderous pronouncements about Evil he now loads upon them. Attempted excursions into the dark places of the psyche soon founder in shallow talk of how "evil breeds evil in a mysterious way". Typically, in *Beyond the Pale*, there is no explanation of the crucial process that turned the happy young creature we first hear of, ionizing amidst the flowers, into a bitter manufacturer of bombs. In fact, there is just the usual flat contrast, an automatically abrupt switch from attractive to repulsive. Ultimately, here and in the other stories, Trevor's small-scale world — two-dimensional and programmed to familiar routines — functions as a peep-show rather than a microcosm.

The corrupting agent

By Anne Duchêne

ALLAN MASSIE:
The Death of Men
249pp. Bodley Head. £6.50.
0 370 30339 3

Allan Massie's new novel — his third, after two which prompted a very respectful welcome — is based on the real-life murder of Aldo Moro; though, as the foreword sturdily stresses, except that the "main character", Corrado Dusa, resembles Moro and occupies a similar place in Italian politics, everything else is "purely imaginary", and this is "a work of fiction, with all the aspirations of a novel".

A writer's interest in refashioning so recent and so shocking an event must be technical (as in the Foray school of fiction), or political, or emblematic. Technicalities do not detain Mr Massie for more than a moment here and there. Nor, really, do politics: the demands of decency force the victim's party very slowly towards negotiation with the terrorists, while all political and self-seeking imperatives incline it to sacrificing him quite comfortably; but all these rumblings are kept pretty much in the wings.

The emblematic, or moral, properties of the story are what engage the author; and it is sad to have to say that they seem to have been somewhat too much for him. Signs that he is going to be highly serious and perhaps a bit confused may already be seen in the book's epigraph, which comes rather ponderously from Oliver Wendell Holmes: "Man at present is a predatory animal... the sacredness of human life is a purely municipal ideal of a validity outside the jurisdiction of every society rests on the death of men". Whether the old autoclave was thinking of the death of men by millions, an idea we have had to assimilate, or of individual death, less, in today's terms, as sacrifice than as barbaric, remains unclear.

In these preliminaries one also notes that whereas the book is dedi-

cated to Colin and Colin Thomas, among other "friends of Roman days", thanks are also given to the Headmistress and Chairman of the Governors of a Scottish girls' boarding-school. Fears engendered here, that a collision is forthcoming between the Latin and the Presbyterian strains always visible in Massie's work, are not unfounded. In this novel he seems uncertain where the centre of interest should lie: whether his imagination has plainly been stirred by the Moro story, and he seeks out the lower reaches of that story with detail that seems truthful, at all the high points in his argument he goes over into truism.

Seeking some way of holding his story at arm's length, Massie uses three alternating viewpoints: the journal of Corrado's brother, Raimundo, an ageing diplomat with a few scruples still left, but no intention of bearing down with them on anything; the (even less likely) journal of the English gentleman, Communist-turned-journalist in Rome, divorced and given to drink; and a withdrawal into third-person, distancing narrative to follow Tomaso, the only conspirator we see often, and even then not closely. Raimundo is able to introduce the Dusa family, but this substance is for the most part wasted as the story moves on.

Of the other viewpoints, that of the genteel English renegade seems otiose, except in supplying some enjoyable but marginal vignettes. The *Tomaso*-narrative allows the interpolation of two crass and callow young American college girls — the sexy one is Tomaso's cousin — whose dialogue is stereotyped, and whose ardent presences are always quite exceptionally boring.

These viewpoints naturally, in the small world of Rome, overlap. All have a common factor: in a little Nietzschean fascist, once almost banged for his views, who acquires through the book like some *rescaped* cat from a Graham Greene or John Le Carré thriller, using and being used, abusing and being abused in shady bars. But the different viewpoints disperse the reader's interest. Corrado, the kidnapped victim, is not the

book's "main character", but only its pivot. Seen first as the negligent, abstracted head of the family (one of his own sons is among his kidnappers), he comes into closer focus only on the eve of his execution. In a last conversation with Tomaso.

This is where the book really founders. Corrado, now, one gathers, purified and illuminated by his experience, explains to Tomaso the limits of political action: "Victory is never what it appears on the prospectus. Power is a drug, a pleasure, a flesh cut the lower reaches of that story with detail that seems truthful, at all the high points in his argument he goes over into truism. Seeking some way of holding his story at arm's length, Massie uses three alternating viewpoints: the journal of Corrado's brother, Raimundo, an ageing diplomat with a few scruples still left, but no intention of bearing down with them on anything; the (even less likely) journal of the English gentleman, Communist-turned-journalist in Rome, divorced and given to drink; and a withdrawal into third-person, distancing narrative to follow Tomaso, the only conspirator we see often, and even then not closely. Raimundo is able to introduce the Dusa family, but this substance is for the most part wasted as the story moves on.

Raimundo, meanwhile, has been to tell his mad brother all about it; returning by taxi he glimpses the "mad face" of the Nietzschean fascist at a café table, and thinks "of the waste land in which he must live". Yet Raimundo himself, returning to enjoy a whole still young enough to seem radiant, lives in no less of one.

Massie probably did not mean to suggest that the fascist and the madman are the only two characters who are quite sure what they are doing, or if he did, he should have made it plainer. As it is, the book is left suspended in a rather weak solution of generalization. Disappointment is proportionate to the scale and nature of the theme; also to the expectation aroused by his previous book, *The Last Peacock*, where he probed a dying society with gentleness and acuity. Here, Massie's peep seems clogged in all the richly textured Roman *impasto*, and the central passionate enquiry comes to seem incidental in a way he cannot have intended.

The flight from the closed system

By Peter Lewis

NICHOLAS MOSLEY:
Serpent
188pp. Secker and Warburg. £6.95.
0 436 28847 8

During the thirty years since Nicholas Mosley published his first book, his fiction has undergone two changes of direction, the second of which (marked by the publication of *Catastrophe* in 1979) may turn out to be much less drastic than the first in the early 1960s. His novels of the 1950s are long, doom-laden hooks characterized by a fashionable pessimism, and by a stylistic and syntactical complexity owing much to James and Faulkner. Implicit in *Corruption* (1957), for example, is a belief that experience can be pinned down exactly by words — if enough are used, and in sufficiently tortuous configurations. Words operate as a completely closed system, and the world as depicted in these early novels is also closed: there is virtually no possibility of transformation or regeneration.

Then, after a five-year gap, Mosley transfigured himself as a novelist in a way that repudiated much of his previous work. In the 1960s, his novels (and sentences) became much shorter, his style simpler, and his narrative method more elliptical. In contrast to the exhaustive analysis of his previous novels, he now left many things unexplained. An unfashionable yet still, but the concept concerning *névroses* (not the things that fall from the sky — those are meteoroids — but merely those phenomena, hazy fog snow, which are the subject matter of meteorology) salutes in the last third of *Géminis* one of his least successful.

Like *Vendredi*, *Géminis* is a novel of ideas. In that it is a novel devoted primarily to the elaborate and digressive *mise en scène* of particular ideas, to the transmutation of particular whimsical and metaphysical, at once whimsical and metaphysical, into particular conceptual locality. The two books overlap in their concerns and

eight years; instead he worked on film scripts and wrote a study of Trotsky as well as his fine biography of Julian Grenfell. Then came *Catastrophe*, which reduced even Mosley's admirers to stunned silence or bewildered incomprehension. At first sight, this highly intellectual, boldly experimental and apparently impenetrable novel seemed like another completely fresh start.

Mosley had never attempted anything as structurally complex before. At the heart of the book are many of the ideas he developed in his novels of the 1960s, but provided now with a scientific framework in the form of Catastrophe Theory, a startling mathematical development of the 1970s with far-reaching implications for the way we view the world. Partly to help the reader decipher this intricate book, Mosley promised a series of six related characters of *Catastrophe*, but he also intended these to stand on their own.

Whether readers of the well-received *Imago Bird* (1980), the first of the six, found that it illuminated *Catastrophe* or not, the book certainly succeeded on its own terms, and in many ways marked a return to Mosley's distinctive idiom of the 1960s. *Serpent*, the second of the six, also succeeds as a self-sufficient novel, and again looks back to the methods of Mosley's most familiar fiction rather than to those of *Catastrophe*; though references to subatomic physics, quantum mechanics, and the principle of indeterminacy maintain the mathematical parallels of its predecessor. Nevertheless, the web of symbolism and the pattern of elusive correspondences in *Serpent* make it a more demanding book than *Imago Bird*.

The narrative itself is slight, most of it taking place on a plane during a flight. Jason, an extremely self-conscious screenwriter, is travelling to Israel with a small group of film people in connection with a script he has written about the Jewish revolt against the Romans in 66 AD, culminating in the siege of Masada in 73 AD, when nearly a thousand Jews took their own lives rather than surrender. The central character in

Jason's script is one of the Jewish leaders, Josephus, usually regarded as a traitor but also the major historian of the war. Believing that a film treatment of this subject cannot be honest and serious as well as popular and commercial, Jason has written an unfilmable script, partly parody or pastiche; the characters quote Shakespeare, Coleridge and Darwin and are conscious of themselves as actors playing roles on a film set.

Sections of Jason's script are interspersed with the main narrative or otherwise incorporated into it, and some of the themes and situations of the script are echoed by events involving the modern characters. Also worked into the narrative of the flight are a few flashbacks concerning Jason and his equally self-conscious wife Lilla (who is also on the flight but in the tourist, not the first-class, compartment with their child) and some episodes in Israel. One of these, featuring David Kahn, is actually set at Masada itself, thus connecting the siege in 73 AD with a contemporary "assault" on the rock by two men who die making a protest of some kind. The other, involving Kahn's wife, takes place at Lod Airport, and again involves an attack and violent death. Precisely what is going on in these episodes is unclear to the Kahn and is never fully explained, just as the death of Julius on the plane remains something of a mystery. Julius is linked with the suspects him of being a terrorist. He is apparently involved in a bet as to whether he can seduce Lilla in flight, and by acting in the role of the lavatory attendant, he causes her acute discomfort, caused by a tight gold ring, by felling him. In the final chapter, the narrative suddenly shifts away from both the flight and the script to describe the chance but symbolic meeting of Jason and Lilla and the Kahn on an Israeli beach, thus bringing together the two contemporary strands of the novel.

Running through the entire narrative are a number of leitmotifs: Plato's allegory of the cave and the sun; the Garden of Eden and the serpent; Noah's Ark and the flight of the dove; the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt. Mosley organizes

these mythic elements into an attempt to create his own myth of the human condition. In a book which stresses the paradoxical and contradictory nature of human experience, it is appropriate that most of the characters are both trapped inside an airliner and at the same time in flight. This contrast between imprisonment and freedom is one of a number of polarities at the heart of the novel: the individual and society; illusion and reality; orthodoxy and heterodoxy; the actor and his role; words and things.

As in a number of his books, Mosley explores the ways in which conventions, whether social, moral, or artistic, can be a form of imprisonment, inhibiting responses, closing the doors of perception instead of opening them. There is a strong Romantic, even Blakean, streak in Mosley's script, exemplified in a line from Jason's script: "The serpent was the angel who woke Adam and Eve from their sleep in the garden." *Serpent* is very much about the responsibility entailed by this awakening, and about how life can be made a "successfully going concern". Despite some of the difficulties of this novel the planned seven-decker of *Catastrophe* and its siblings is turning out to be a less lively prospect than at first it seemed.

Canadian Literature Number 89, September 1981 (*Canadian Literature*, 2021 West Mall, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1W5) published quarterly, \$18 in Canada, \$21 abroad) has as its theme "Face of Reality/Facing Reality". Articles on this subject include "Colloquial Style and the Tory Mode" by T. D. MacLulich and "The Novels of Richard B. Wright" by Eleanor Johnston as well as essays on Sylvia Fraser, Mordecai Richler, Hugh MacLennan, Frederick Philip Grove, the Canadian novel of the 1920s and the changing Hungarian identity in Canadian Fiction. The volume also contains poems by Kim Maltman, Jim Joyce, Roy Borsos, Christopher Levenson, Erin Moore, Lynda Resnier and Ralph Gustafson. *Canadian Literature* carries over fifty pages of "Opinions and Notes".

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167pp. Milner. £8.95.
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War legends seem to have an eternal life. Only last year "a senior British statesman" told Iain Sproat, "Oh yes, I know all about the Wodehouse case. The man was an out-and-out traitor. He was anti-Churchill. He broadcast propaganda for the Nazis. All three statements are untrue. Wodehouse was not a traitor. He was not anti-Churchill. He did not broadcast propaganda for the Nazis. Iain Sproat has done a great service to historical truth by demolishing these legends. He has also discovered why successive British governments refused to release the evidence that decisively clears Wodehouse. As a final service Sproat gives us the text of the five peccant broadcast talks; they are as brilliant as any Wodehouse novel and as innocuous.

Legends about Wodehouse started early. He was supposed to have escaped the First World War by going to America. In fact he volunteered twice, once in England and once in the United States, being rejected both times on medical grounds. In 1940 he and his wife were living at Le Touquet as they had done for some years past. As the war drew nearer Wodehouse inquired of the local British representative whether they should leave. He was told there was no danger of the Germans reaching Le Touquet. A couple of days later the Germans arrived. Wodehouse was first put under house arrest and then interned. He had two months of harsh imprisonment and rough transport,

including a passage in French cattle-trucks. Wodehouse was to describe this later:

Eight horses might manage to make themselves fairly comfortable in one of these cross-country loose-boxes, but forty men are cramped. Every time I stretched my legs, I kicked a human soul. This would not have mattered so much, but every time the human souls stretched their legs, they kicked me.

In September 1940 Wodehouse reached Upper Silesia, where some eight hundred British subjects were interned in the local lunatic asylum. Wodehouse found Tost asylum delightful after his earlier experiences. A little later he was allotted a padded cell where he wrote most of a novel, *Money in the Bank*.

In June 1941 Wodehouse was released from internment, in accordance with German regulations, because he was approaching sixty. He was moved to Berlin, where he met a German foreign ministry official whom he had known in America years before. The official asked Wodehouse whether he would like to be broadcast to America. Wodehouse wished to thank his American friends who had written to him and also to show that he, like his fellow internees, was in good spirits. As he put it later, "Mine was simply the flippancy cheerful attitude of all British prisoners. It was a point of honour with us not to whine." The five broadcasts gave a light-hearted account of "How to Become an Internee" and how to continue in this role. There was not a word of political propaganda and no favourable comments on the Germans.

The broadcasts were originally beamed to America only. They pro-

voked a storm of abuse in England even before they were broadcast to this country. Most of those who wrote to the press or protested in other ways had not heard or read the broadcasts. This is characteristic of a witch-hunt: the less foundation there is for the abuse, the more hysterical it becomes. New legends sprang up each day. It was alleged that Wodehouse had been released from internment after making a bargain to broadcast. Actually he was released simply because he had nearly reached the age of sixty. He was paid one fee, of £25. Thereafter he received no reward or favour. He lived on his royalties from Spain and Sweden and enjoyed some hospitality from German friends who were far from Nazis. In 1943 he moved to the Hotel Bristol in Paris where a year later the British caught up with him. Major Cussen of MI5 conducted a prolonged inquiry which reached the firm conclusion that Wodehouse had committed no offence and that there were no grounds for prosecuting him. This conclusion was announced in the House of Commons by the Attorney-General of the day, whereupon Quintin Hogg, MP, demanded that Wodehouse should be prosecuted. He spent some time in Switzerland and then removed to the United States where he spent the rest of his life. He was working on his ninety-eighth novel when he died.

For years past Iain Sproat has been battling for the release of Major Cussen's report vindicating Wodehouse. At last in 1980 he got an answer. When Wodehouse left Tost for Berlin, another internee, also aged sixty, went with him and subsequently visited the German Foreign Ministry. Even in 1980 the British authorities did not wish the name of this man to be known.

Sproat made the common-sense suggestion that the man's name should be deleted from Cussen's report. This was done and the report was then released somewhat late in the day. A curious little episode. Was the nameless man a British agent whose identity had still to be concealed all these years later? Had he collaborated with the enemy, as Cussen thought possible? Or did the government departments concerned merely hit on this cock-and-bull story as an excuse for not releasing the relevant documents on principle? We shall never know and it does not matter. But it adds a further comic element to a volume rich in comedy.

The highest comedy is of course provided by Wodehouse's five broadcasts, which Sproat prints in full. They are products of Wodehouse's high art, the more admirable for having been composed in the discomfort of a prison camp. They are very funny. They are also very courageous. You might have thought that even the most passionate fire-eater would have said, "There's an old boy who is keeping his pecker up", as I remember I did at the time. Few agreed with me. Sproat adds to the gaiety of nations by reprinting most of the newspaper correspondence that arose from the Wodehouse "case": letters in the *Daily Telegraph* virulently against Wodehouse, those in *The Times* more judicious and a few even favourable to him. Many of the correspondents attributed to Wodehouse unpatriotic sentiments which he had never uttered. A good number of the correspondents were themselves authors, usually not of the first rank, who seem to have written their letters because in wartime they had nothing better to do.

Sproat also reprints a broadcast talk by the prestigious columnist "Cassandra" - William Connor of the

Daily Mirror. It can be recommended as a striking example of vituperation without any foundation in fact. The Governors of the BBC found the piece distasteful and refused to broadcast it. But this was war-time. Duff Cooper, the Minister of Information, was empowered to issue orders to the BBC. He now ordered that "Cassandra's" effusion should be broadcast and it was. Duff Cooper's own contribution to wartime propaganda was to translate Macaulay's poem "The Armada" on the radio.

There was an interesting sequel to the affair. Years later William Connor learnt the truth of the affair and gave Wodehouse a full and generous apology. Duff Cooper never regretted what he had done and the nearest he came to an apology was to remark that "much as he objected to the broadcasts, he believed that Wodehouse had never written anything better". The BBC did not long adhere to its first enlightened response. In 1943 it announced that, because of Wodehouse's broadcasts from Berlin, his work was to be banned on the BBC - the ban even extending to songs with his lyrics. In 1950 however the BBC asked A. P. Watt (Wodehouse's literary agent) for permission to use *Damsel in Distress* on the Light Programme. Wodehouse wrote to a friend:

I had always said to myself: "One of these days the BBC would come asking for something of mine, and then won't I draw myself up to my full height and write them a stinker saying that after what had occurred I am amazed - nay astounded - at their crust - etc., etc." Of course what actually happened was that I wrote to Watt saying Okay, go ahead.

Wodehouse was the one who came out of the affair with honour.

The pleasures of Plum

By Arthur Marshall

BENNY GREEN:
P. G. Wodehouse
A Literary Biography
256pp. Pavilion/Michael Joseph. £8.95.
0 907516 04 1

What ought a successful author to look like? Arnold Bennett was indistinguishable from a prosperous pork butcher. Shaw always seemed to me, and especially in the John portrait, like a breezy Scandinavian sea-captain. Barrie might have been a quaint little unmarried curate with Difficulties (not too far from the truth). Galsworthy was obviously a rather severe bank manager. I am afraid that I cannot extend your credit facilities any further". And P. G. Wodehouse? There is no doubt about it - an immensely jolly prep school sports master, merrily passing on the cricketing and footer tips picked up at Dulwich, known to all as "Woody" and very widely loved and admired.

And that too, except that he was called "Plum", a contraction of the Pelham Grenville with which the font had saddled him, was not too wide of the mark, for there was, to the end of his ninety-three years, something engagingly immature and unworldly about this "abnormally normal" man, a *naïveté* that was to help bring about the only real disaster and tragedy of his life.

To get an unbiased and objective estimation of an author's abilities it is not always to a fellow author that one would hurry. As in the case of Mungton, few writers from Edmund Wilson downwards (or do I mean upwards?) could bear those enormous sales, that world-wide popularity, the deluxe life-style. To George Orwell, Wodehouse was "a wealthy parasite" and to Sean O'Casey, "English Literature's performing flea". J. B. Priestley has in his time been less than flattering. A. A. Milne, to know whom well is to love whom less, provided an ill-judged sneer at Wodehouse for shirking the responsibility of fatherhood. Belloc, however, and Oxford University rated him very highly and Benny Green, to what will be the great satisfaction of many readers, writes about him with nothing but understanding, admiration, enthusiasm and affection.

Mr Green has wisely based his excellent survey of this prime laugh-ter-provoker on his literary output for in the private life there is little to tell of abiding interest. Often formed out in childhood to strangers (possibly the originals of those extremely alarming aunts) by parents who, because of his father's occupation in the Indian Civil Service, were stationed in the Crown Colony of Hong Kong, the first really prolonged happiness that he knew was after his entry to Dulwich College in 1894, a profoundly influential experience which sparked off the series of school stories with which this undoubted genius began his writing career (who was it who discovered that, to one of the stories, the opposing captains in a cricket match were called Burgess and Maclean?). There was never a more characteristic or successful, both in work and games, schoolboy and it was back to Dulwich that his thoughts often contentedly wandered for the rest of his life. In 1928, aged 47, he wrote to his lifelong schoolfriend, William Townsend, in a valuable correspondence widely drawn on by Mr Green, "Dulwich have got a red-hot team this year." Eight years later, while he was doing an overpaid and underworked film-writing stint in Hollywood (a place known to him as Dollywood-on-the-Pacific), he writes, "Isn't it extraordinary how we never seem to get the breaks against Haileybury?" And in 1945, hardly a happy year for him, he was rejoicing at the news that Dulwich had, in 1944, won all their school cricket matches.

How, one wonders, would he have fared if, after Dulwich, this clever sixth-former had tried for, and won, a scholarship to Oxford? This had been the family intention but an intention, unfortunately negated by

the fact that his father's retirement pension was most unfairly paid to him in rupees. It will be recalled that when Miss Prism encourages Cecily to read her Political Economy, she advises her to omit the somewhat too sensational passages concerning the fall of the rupee. And fall is just what poor Wodehouse Senior's rupees did, making Oxford, with or without a scholarship, out of the question, denying his son any further education and plunging him into an unacceptable City and commercial life in the form of employment as what must have been the world's least competent bank clerk in the Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank in Lombard Street. Any experience, Ira J. Nutcombe and Bradbury Fisher; the ladies' magazine *Cosy Moments* and the song "There's a Light in Thy Bower".

In the intervals of banking (sacked after two years) and while our author was housed in a three-pound-a-week bed-sitter in Chelsea, the staggeringly rich flood of adult stories began to pour forth. These were good times for struggling authors. As Benny Green says, "In those days a starving writer could hardly throw himself out of a window without landing on a magazine editor." The available outlets for fiction were countless. There were the *Strand*, *Pearson's*, the *London*, *Cassell's*, the *Pall Mall*, the *Window*, *Blackwood's*, the *Cornhill* and dozens more. And nothing discouraged Wodehouse for long.

The curious thing about those early days is that in spite of the blizzard of rejection slips, I had the most complete confidence in myself. I knew I was good.

He goes on to say, typically, that it was only later that confidence totally left him, but by 1901 his stories had appeared, not always under his own name, in *Answers*, *Tit Bits*, *Fun*, the *Sir James's Gazette*, and, even, in *Sandown's Physical Culture Magazine*.

How fascinating to discover that Wodehouse joined others in poking fun at the enemy invasion scare, a mania that took strongly on in the early 1900s and had even raised its head before that. We owe to Richard Usborne, a gifted fellow teller in Wodehouse and other fields, the information that, as far back as 1870, *Blackwood's Magazine* had serialized a story called "The Battle of Dorking", the first town since Hastings to have been disturbed by impertinent foreign visitors. Wodehouse's spoof, to give it a descriptive name popular at the time, was called "The Swoop" and involved a Boy Scout leader called Clarence Chugwater, a brown-booted four-footed in command of the Aldwych Troop. Advancing bravely with catapults and booby sticks, they take on the invaders - Monaco has captured Portsmouth, the Chinese are in Wales, some Young Turks have occupied Scarborough and the Swiss Navy has shelled Lyme Regis and is about to land an army just to the west of the bathing-machines. Near Epping, the Russians have shot a fox. The position could hardly be more serious, but Clarence's patriotism is not, alas, shared by his family. When two Germans call at Maison-Chugwater, his father tries to let the house to them at a profitable rental, while his elder brother tries to flog them some dubious insurance policies.

The World of P. G. Wodehouse by Herbert Warren Wind (96pp. Hutchinson. £5.95. 0 90 145670 3) incorporates a *New Yorker* Profile from the year of its subject's ninetieth birthday (separately published in America the following year) and a bandful of additional pages describing that birthday party, Sir Pelham's knight-hood and his death, to make an elegant tribute in his native country for the centenary of Wodehouse's birth. Wind, a foremost golf correspondent, was a friend of the Wodehouses in the last six years of the novelist's life; his affectionate blog-

raphical portrait concentrates on the years in America, which was after all where Wodehouse turned fame to fortune as fiction-writer, journalist and lyricist in the years of and after the First World War, and made his home again after the Second. If a little like a Martini cocktail poured out but undrunk at one party and after being kept to the ice-box served again at the next, the strength of the Wodehouse spirit and the lure of the *New Yorker* vermouth yet make a palatable offering: one just wants more.

R.T.B.

Keith Brockie's Wildlife Sketchbook

Foreword by H.R.H. THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH KG, KT
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Sifting the evidence

By Richard Usborne

J. H. C. MORRIS:
Thank You, Wodehouse
132pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
£6.95.
0 297 78001 8

"I don't know if I'm on my head or my heels!"
"Sift the evidence. Which end of you is nearer the ceiling?" said Lord Ickenham.

I don't know in which Wodehouse novel that bit comes, and I expect I have not remembered it verbatim. But in essence it gives the tenor of this book. With contributions from two equally addicted friends J. H. C. Morris has sifted, through a mind trained by the law and the teaching of law at Oxford, the evidence in a number of cases of conflict and doubt in the Wooster and Blandings books of Wodehouse. Additionally there is a chapter on some of the problems set by the golf stories, notably the ideologically and domestically "beefy" and polypholistic Agnes Flack. It leaves a lot of books and multitude of problems still needing to be tackled. One hopes that Dr Morris is already at work on further volumes, equally entertaining.

Bertie Wooster was a Magdalen man, in spite of the fountain that Wodehouse specifies for his college. Magdalen Senior Common Room has long been a hotbed of Wodehouse appreciation and scholarship. Dr George Gordon, then Magdalen's President and Oxford's Vice-Chancellor, nominated and successfully lobbied Wodehouse for an Hon D Litt in 1939, briefed the Public Orator, Dr Cyril Bailey, in what to say about him in Latin and, in his "Vice" capacity, admitted him to "vir lepidissime, facetissime, venustissime, iocissimissime, lubridissimissime" Wodehouse, in a notable company which included Lord Lothian and

Felix Frankfurter, was the only one in rate presentation in verse, and Dr Bailey's last five lines of Horatian hexameters (their last three words lifted, without acknowledgment, from some verses of Julius Caesar) are, for my money, the best bit of plummy crit that anybody has ever done on Wodehouse. In those days there was no English crib given in the programme of Erucaenia. But Wodehouse had been a good schoolboy classic, and had there been money for him to follow his Double-First-and-Newdigate elder brother to Oxford, he might have distinguished himself similarly. Certainly in 1939, although for the past twenty years he had given his Latin to Jeeves, Wodehouse, in spite of curious borrowed robes and hat, and "feeling like 30 cents", would have been able to follow the Gordon/Bailey phrases and praises in the Latin.

One tends to think that Ronald Knox, in his spoof studies of the Sherlock Holmes stories and the Barchester novels for the amusement of paper-reading societies and dining clubs, was the first to apply the techniques of nineteenth-century German classical criticism to favourite lighter literature. But Wodehouse himself, in 1900 and barely, if indeed, out of Dulwich and into the bank, did, somewhat in mimicry of the current studies in Homeric evidences, a gentle hatchet job on *Tom Brown's School Days* in *The Public School Magazine* (see "The Tom Brown Question" at the end of *Tales of St Austin's*). Morris nowhere says that conflicting Wodehouse statements - ages, dates, milages and such - suggest a different author, as it might be Queen Victoria for "In Memoriam" Marlowe or Bacon for Shakespeare; that very dark lady for the *Odyssey*. Indeed, his assumption, postulate or *teminus a quo* is that Wodehouse wrote all Wodehouse and made no mistakes, and that it is up to him (Morris) and us fellow bookworms to drag sense and sequence out of the

sacrosanct texts. How old is Bertie? How old is Lord Emsworth? How many uncles does Bertie have? How many sisters Lord E? What did Bertie read at Oxford? Why was the Empress's Wolff-Lehmann daily diet, as recommended by Whiffle (or was Whiffle?) That's a crux and a half! reduced from 57,000 calories to 5,700? Where is Market Blandings and what are its train services? These are some of the difficulties that Morris and his associates touch on or tackle.

The truth is - and Morris knows this, and by the rules of his game, ignores it - that Wodehouse, though fairly consistent in nearly a hundred books of fiction, never let consistency shackle him when he found a good plot. He would spend months blocking out the scenario of a novel before identifying the people in it. Reggie Pepper and Bertie Mannering Phipps were earlier shills for the eventual Bertie Wooster. Lord Ickenham is a latter-day Psmith. Lord Ickenham and Galahad Threepwood were reading the other's script. Lord Ickenham spreads sweetness and light. Gally light and sweetness. Both, in different books, carry their great sponges (Lord Ickenham's was named "Joyeuse") down the passage at Blandings to their baths.

And what is your canon? Where are the cuts? Do you accept Bertie as Mannering Phipps in "Extricating Young Gussie" in *The Man With Two Left Feet*, published in 1977? Surely not: yet Bertie Wooster is there in all but surname. Do you accept Bertie's statement in *Much Obliged, Jeeves* (1971), when Wodehouse was ninety, his memory wobbly and his publishers' ditto: that Arnold Abney had been his prep-school headmaster? I think eventually Morris's type of scholastic studies, to make the cuts at about 1920 (dismissing Reggie Pepper) and 1965 (missing *Plum Pie*, which is full of difficulties of dates). That still leaves

Sam the Sudden (1927) and *Frozen Assets* (1964) as being largely the same book; and *Ring for Jeeves* (1953), which was based on a play for which Wodehouse had lent Jeeves as a character to Guy Bolton, has Jeeves right out of his class, and must probably be excluded from the canon. Incidentally, in his discussion on where Bertie got his money, Morris ought to have looked at the first printing of the story "Jeeves Takes Charge", in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1917 and repeated in the same magazine in its recent May/June 1980 issue. On the "Bertie's Money" question there are some significant differences in the text there from the story in, let's say, *The Jeeves Omnibus*.

For laughs, too, Morris might like to get the Oxford University Press's Alpha edition of *Summer Lightning*. OUP's Alpha series of classics is for foreign students of English, and all the books use the same vocabulary of 1,500 words... *Oliver Twist*, *Jane Eyre*, *Tess*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Little Women*, *Lord Jim* and *Summer Lightning*. In the canonical *Summer Lightning*, you remember, Gally has been writing in his Reminiscences stories of Gregory Parsloe in his scandalous youth. One is of how Parsloe stole Lord Burper's teeth and pawned them in the Edgware Road. Another is of Parsloe and the prawns, we never learn what that story was, but it made Beach the butler roar with laughter in his deck chair near the shrubbery when he was in charge of the precious manuscript. In the book in its Alpha form restrictions of vocabulary make Parsloe steal Lord Burper's glasses and sell them in the Edgware Road; and the story of the prawns becomes the story of the snowball. Worth a footnote, perhaps, in Morris's next book?

It is essential in reviews such as this to prove that you, the reviewer, have read more carefully than the author of the book. Well, for starters, Morris says that nothing is

known about Bertie's Aunt-Dahlia's first husband. That's a misquote: see *Jeeves in The Office*, Chapter 17, where we learn, much to our surprise, that the deceased had been a no-good drunk and had drowned in the Thames. And, in a throwaway, Morris says "Marital relations between him (Tom Travers) and Aunt Dahlia seem to have ceased at the time of the saga - at any rate, the time of abiding interest. Often formed out in childhood to strangers (possibly the originals of those extremely alarming aunts) by parents who, because of his father's occupation in the Indian Civil Service, were stationed in the Crown Colony of Hong Kong, the first really prolonged happiness that he knew was after his entry to Dulwich College in 1894, a profoundly influential experience which sparked off the series of school stories with which this undoubted genius began his writing career (who was it who discovered that, to one of the stories, the opposing captains in a cricket match were called Burgess and Maclean?). There was never a more characteristic or successful, both in work and games, schoolboy and it was back to Dulwich that his thoughts often contentedly wandered for the rest of his life. In 1928, aged 47, he wrote to his lifelong schoolfriend, William Townsend, in a valuable correspondence widely drawn on by Mr Green, "Dulwich have got a red-hot team this year." Eight years later, while he was doing an overpaid and underworked film-writing stint in Hollywood (a place known to him as Dollywood-on-the-Pacific), he writes, "Isn't it extraordinary how we never seem to get the breaks against Haileybury?" And in 1945, hardly a happy year for him, he was rejoicing at the news that Dulwich had, in 1944, won all their school cricket matches.

Meanwhile, from Dr Morris, I would particularly like a study of the behaviour of country justices of the Peace (such as Sir Watkyn Bassett, Sir Gregory Parsloe and Lord Emsworth) how long a prison sentence can Sir Watkyn, for instance, give Bertie Wooster, for instance, without a trial, without access to a solicitor, without even a courtroom? Wodehouse seems to suggest thirty days as a good ordinary sentence in such circumstances. I would like to be sure that Wodehouse was right. Dr Morris would know.

A selection of Arthur Marshall's articles from the *New Statesman* over the past four years has recently been published under the title *I'll Let You Know: Musings from Myrlebank* (181pp. Hamish Hamilton. £5.95. 0 241 10644 3). Among the topics covered are Victorian public-school headmasters, bidets, royal wedding presents, and Guy Burgess. The book is illustrated by Tim Jaques.

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The art of the possible

By John Sturrock

OULIPO:

Atlas de littérature potentielle 432pp. Paris: Gallimard

This consummate *Atlas de littérature potentielle* is the second anthology of their lucubrations to have been set before the outside world by the veridictous members of OULIPO. The first was published in 1973, between which and the present assemblage eight years of ingenious and concentrated thought have intervened, and some eighty meetings of this brilliant *cinéma*. The OULIPO, or OUVroir de Littérature Potentielle, was started in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais as a branch - or, given its strongly mathematical bent, I will say a sub-set - of the *Collège de Pataphysique*, with which it shares members, a rather private sense of humour and a style of writing at once light and pedantic.

There are two sides to OULIPO, the analytical and the synthetic. In its analytical moments it searches out all the imposing variety of formal constraints under which the world's poets, chiefly, and prose-writers have always groined. In its synthetic and creative moments, it uses these findings as a base from which to extrapolate formal constraints the like of which no writer has ever groined under before. The ideology behind all this is classical; OULIPO will have nothing to do with the romantic afflatus. Its members must think their way out of the nasty corners into which they have voluntarily penned themselves; theirs is a club of literary rationalists.

Among other kindly idiosyncrasies, OULIPO admits of no hierarchy in its list of members between the living and the dead, but sadly, since it first went public in 1973, one of its founders, Raymond Queneau, has died. The *Atlas* begins with a number of commemorative pieces about Queneau, who had a wonderful head for figures as well as a wonderful head for words, being a spare-time mathematician of force and the inventor among other things of hyper-prime numbers - prime numbers which remain prime numbers as each of their digits is removed one by one, starting either from the right or the left.

If there is one work of French literature which represents ideally the hopes and exploits of OULIPO it is Queneau's *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* of 1961, a book of awesome potentiality. It contains fourteen sonnets the constituent lines of which might, given several eternities of leisure, or the services of a single-minded computer, be rearranged in as many different combinations as Queneau's title claims. He was not a man to shirk his duty and the raw materials which he offers the potential sonneteer are so constructed that, when recombined, they would make poems that were legitimate formally, syntactically and even, wonderful to relate, semantically. No wonder the *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* is the now hallowed text of the Oulipians.

One section of the *Atlas* is made over to defining the "principles" of OULIPO's activity, but these, as their formalization grows more advanced, prove too much for the innumerate, algebra-less boobies like myself. There is no need to understand them in any case before passing on to the true source of delight in this book, which is the many examples it includes of OULIPO at work.

At work, first of all, on the methodical deformation of existing works of poetry and prose, a sort of parody by numbers. Take the formula *S + fond*: of which Oulipians are rightly fond; this involves substituting each noun (or verb, or adjective, or whatever) in a given extract with the noun (or verb, etc.) occurring seven places after it in an agreed-on dictionary. The effects of such pranks are, most diverting. There is a choice

illustration of them in the *Atlas*, using a paragraph from Chamfort and changing both certain nouns and proper names by reference to the *Petit Larousse*. Thus Chamfort's

Mme Desparbès, couchant avec Louis XV, le roi lui dit: "Tu as couché avec tous mes sujets. - Ah! Sire. - Tu as eu le duc de Choiseul. - Il est si puissant! - Le maréchal de Richelieu. - Il a tant d'esprit! - Monville. - Il a une si belle jambe! - A la bonne heure, mais le duc d'Amont, qui n'a rien de tout cela. - Ah, Sire, il est si attaché à Votre Majesté!"

becomes, when doctored: Mariène Dietrich, couchant avec H. P. Lovecraft, le romancier lui dit: "Tu as couché avec tous mes supermen! - Ah, smicard! - Tu as eu Noam Chomsky. - Il est si puissant! - Tu as eu Jean Richelieu. - Il a tant d'aspirit! - Paul Morand. - Il a une si belle jambe! - A la bonne heure, mais Vincent Auriant, qui n'a rien de tout cela. - Ah, smicard! Il est si attaché aux Allocations Familiales!"

Another peculiarly charming class of Oulipian operations comes under the heading of "homomorphisms", whose common characteristic is to reproduce an existing form of words as strictly as possible syntactically or phonetically while making interesting hay with it semantically. OULIPO's great predecessor in this field was the mad millionaire novelist Raymond Roussel, whose prolonged and obsessive punning constitutes what, in a happy if presumptuous phrase, OULIPO talks of as a "plagiat par anticipation". The *Atlas* records some pretty "homophones", culled from a future publication entitled "La cantatrice saute" that will seemingly be devoted to nothing but 101 rival plays on the name of the Spanish soprano Montserrat Caballé. There is the space here to run no more than a single trailer for this enticing volume.

Giscard d'Estaing aimait sincèrement son premier ministre. Quelle ne fut pas sa tristesse quand il apprit que celui-ci était très ostensiblement ennuyé avec qu'il prononçait un important discours. Mon Chirac a baillé!

This highly economical narrative has been overtaken by history, as one can see, though even the array and rivalry in the *Opposition* in France just now it might be adjudged to be even more pointed than at the time of its composition. Its author is Georges Perec, one of the stars of the *Atlas* and the never to be forgotten author a few years ago of a lipogrammatic novel of some 300 pages without a single occurrence of the useful letter *e*.

Lipograms, palindromes, heterograms (in which no letter of the alphabet may recur), pangrams (in which all letters of the alphabet must appear) are a regular and productive object of OULIPO's thoughts. I have learnt from the *Atlas* that the shortest pangram in French is three characters more economical than the longest in English: "Whisky vert: jupes cinq fox d'aplomb" as against "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog", although the French contestant looks a bit shaky syntactically (and would collapse completely if doctored of its colon) and verges on the senseless. OULIPO must do better than this, and surely will. It is a body too ambitious and dedicated to be nationalistic, and has been scouring the back numbers of *Notes & Queries* in its quest for distinguished ancestors. From an issue of March 1861 it has discovered an impressive neologism in an English "heterogram", or sentence containing all the letters of the alphabet just once. It is the work of Augustus De Morgan (and what a proto-Oulipien figure he was, with, I read, in the *OJB*, his "humorous detestation" of "trees, fields and birds", which puts him in the Queneau class as an agoraphobe) and goes: "I, quartz, pyx, who fling muck bags" - it doesn't quite work because it has turned into a second pangram, and so on. Two months after De Morgan's effort, in the

same columns, another contributor came up with an alternative, in precisely such unpredictable blunders: "Get nymph, quiz mad brow; fix luck", in which the same pairs of letters are again elided. So the perfect English heterogram hasn't yet been found.

The computer, necessarily, is the toiling Oulipian's futuristic friend, and much headway has been made with these thoughtful machines in the past eight years, since the earlier actually realizing potential texts, as opposed to merely thinking up ways of how they can be realized, make it the perfect auxiliary. Moreover, if so programmed, it can give the reader (who now becomes the user) a part to play in realizing them, and this has always been OULIPO's wish, since it was Queneau's belief that too much literature of the orthodox kind left too little to the reader's imagination. He tried to make the reader, too, work. A disciple, Marcel Benabou, has begun the elaboration of a computer programme which will disgorge aphorisms by the ream of print-out. Key your name into the circular monster and it will provide you with all the worldly wisdom that it supposes you lack. The examples given in the *Atlas* have the ring - in the form - of aphorisms all right, even if they lack the bite that alone confers immortality in this pithy genre: "Mieux vaut mémoire avec mythe que temps avec matière"; "Le bonheur est dans l'avenir, non dans le goût"; "Il n'y a pas de plaisir là où il n'y a pas de présent". Mere echoes of the masters as yet, but after eight years and who knows what La Rochefoucauldian gems we shall be getting.

The Italian novelist Italo Calvino proposes a contrary use for the computer, which is not to enlarge creative possibilities but to restrict them. By feeding into it a repertoire of characters, and of actions doable by one character to another - somewhat melodramatic actions, in the example on show: poisoning, seducing, strangling, and the like - as well as various logical, psychological and ethical constraints on who can be permitted to do what and to whom, Calvino is able to determine which combinations of his agents and actions make writable narratives. In this way, his fiction-writer's legwork can be done for him and he can be left free to look for the Democritian *chamnet* that turns an otherwise mechanical, combinatorial scheme into a work of art.

As a last instance of the sort of games a veteran Oulipien gets up to, cite the telephone-number inspired poetry of Noël Arnaud. This technique, developed in the sadly lost days when Paris phone numbers, like London ones, began with a triplet of letters, has now been adapted to cope with all-figure numbers. By reference to the dial on a telephone of the ancien régime, the digits of the number can be turned into letters of the alphabet, but since each digit (except for 0 and 1) stands for three letters, the poet has a choice - which is just as well, because if he didn't his chances of forming more than one or two sensible words would be gone. For a long poem many telephone numbers will be needed, but they do not have to be picked at random: it is possible, by going to the yellow pages, to make an Arnaudesque poem from the numbers of all the local fishermen; let us say, or those of the members of the Arts Council Literature Panel. Not all numbers work but, as Arnaud assures us, there are enough numbers which will in the Paris directory to offer a poetic potential fully the equal, quantitatively speaking, of the *Légende des siècles*.

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Blunders in the labyrinth

By Michael Butler

By Michael Butler

FRIEDRICH DÜRRENMATT:

Werkausgabe in dreissig Bänden Das dramatische Werk (17 volumes boxed) DM130. 3 257 20890 8

Das Prosawerk (12 volumes boxed) DM100. 3 257 20890 1 Zurich: Diogenes.

Of all the significant writers who have emerged on the German literary scene since 1945 none has proved so consistently controversial as Friedrich Dürrenmatt. After the initial scandal in Zurich over his first play, *Die vier Hunderter* (1947), his novels *Der Richter und sein Henker* (1952), *Das Versprechen* (1953) and *Der Verdacht* (1958) rapidly established themselves as best-sellers, while his two major dramas *Der Besuch der alten Dame* (1956) and *Die Physiker* (1962) won for the Swiss author an international reputation. At the same time, his predilection for the "lighter" modes of fiction - the principal novels, for example, are presented as detective stories - and a whole series of stage plays, culminating in *Die Missetäter* (1973), *Die Frist* (1977) and *Die Pause* (1979), confirmed a growing feeling, especially among professional critics, that Dürrenmatt was not to be taken entirely seriously, indeed, that he was now a distinctly anachronistic figure. Thus on the one hand Dürrenmatt has acquired the trappings of a modern classic - compulsory reading in schools and colleges - on the other, he remains a continuing source of irritation to the literary intelligentsia.

It is a timely gesture, therefore, to celebrate Dürrenmatt's sixtieth birthday with a Collected Edition of his works, complete with a thirtieth volume which documents a small fraction of the varied critical response over the past thirty-five years. For the first time it is possible to trace with ease the chronological development of an extraordinary career which includes eighteen plays, radical adaptations of Shakespeare, Goethe, Büchner and Strindberg, radio plays, film scripts, novels and short stories, together with important theoretical writings on the theatre and a major series of philosophical and political essays. Surveying this rich and provocative production, it is difficult to understand why Dürrenmatt's stature should be so frequently challenged or so grudgingly conceded.

This splendid edition, in which Dürrenmatt himself has closely cooperated, should prompt a welcome re-evaluation of a writer who with equal élan manages to offend both Right and Left with his stubborn vision of human stupidity and the appalling cruelty inspired by competing ideologies.

In his *Dramaturgische Überlegungen zu den "Wiedererfunden"* (1967), printed as an appendix to this drastic revision of *Als stehl geschrieben*, Dürrenmatt attempts to differentiate his concept of theatre and its relationship to social reality. Taking the fate of Scott of the Antarctic, he imagines how other dramatists might have handled the subject: Shakespeare, for example, would have explored the grandeur of Scott's ambition and traced his downfall to a tragic flaw in his character; Brecht would have seen the catastrophe in terms of the vicious economic competition of late capitalism; Beckett would have composed an eloquent "endgame" in which the isolated consciousnesses of the doomed explorers dimmed into nothingness in the icy wastes. Dürrenmatt's version, however, Scott accidentally locks himself in a cold store while checking provisions for the expedition. Undetected and robbed of all heroic pretensions, Scott's initial bewilderment, frantic struggle and lonely death take on an unequivocal note of comedy as Dürren-

matt pursues the gross discrepancy between adventurous ideal and banal aberration.

In Dürrenmatt's view, the contemporary world is characterized by precisely such unpredictable blunders. Fate is replaced by Chance, human reason is continually checked by outbreaks of irrationality. In such an absurd environment there can be no heroes. The integrated world-view, say, of classical civilization has been destroyed by relativity. In place of clear structures and absolute moral laws, contemporary society has developed an increasingly abstract bureaucracy in which individual worth is reduced to a statistic and individual integrity to communal farce. Nowadays, as Dürrenmatt puts it in his essay "Theaterprobleme" (1955), "It is Creon's secretaries who deal with the case of Antigone."

The dominant image Dürrenmatt has chosen by which to depict this situation is the Labyrinth. In a world bereft of metaphysical justification and philosophical certainties, man is caught in a stifling prison of futility. Prey to the Minotaur - but at times identifying with the condemned beast itself - only the isolated individual is able to rebel against an apparently hopeless predicament. Dürrenmatt's plays portray a succession of such "courageous individuals" - the eponymous Duke (*Der Blinde*, 1948), the reluctant Emperor (*Romulus der Große*, 1949), Ubelohé (*Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi*, 1952), Akki (*Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon*, 1953), and in their different ways, Ill (*Der Besuch der alten Dame*), Möbius (*Die Physiker*) and Cóp (*Der Missetäter*) - who all retain or rediscover an ability to discern truths which bring them into conflict with their myopic associates. Their revolt may prove ironic or absurd, but their stance preserves for them a last trace of human dignity. Significantly, they appear as variations of Don Quixote - nobly vainly comic figures, but ultimately distinguished by a proud tenacity.

Dürrenmatt's plays, however, are not presented as finished "statements" but constructed as a series of working hypotheses to test the truth of his insights into contemporary social reality. They are dramatic models, he claims, with which to investigate the inner tensions of that reality: "I think out the world by playing it through."

This mixture of intellectual experiment, imagination and playfulness could not be further from the German tradition of documentary theatre with its implicit trust in "facts", which resurfaced in the 1960s, or from Brecht's Marxist position, anchored in an optimistic belief in the inevitability of progress and the ultimate triumph of reason. In contrast, Dürrenmatt's imaginative world is ruled by ironic reversals, ludicrous accidents, grotesque mistakes. His theatre is not crudely mimetic but employs its bleak humour to analyse the structures rather than the content of self-delusion and social dishonesty. It is in this sense that - despite an apparently crushing pessimism - he can be called a moralist.

The volumes covering the author's narrative work reveal a similar paradoxical interplay between chaos and order. Typically, Dürrenmatt chooses that most "classical" of genres, the detective story, in which each and every moral order is traditionally restored. The stringent application of human reason, in order to demonstrate once more his vision of a world dominated by chance and accident. Here, too, it is a question of individual eccentricities who oppose the implacable hostility of the Labyrinth, whether the "Minotaur" is expressed in terms of an ex-Nazi concentration camp doctor or of society's moral lethargy in general - what the protagonist of *Der Missetäter* (1966) calls the "monstrous disorder of things".

The exuberant imagery which tends to mar some of Dürrenmatt's dramatic work is effectively controlled by the different discipline of

narrative composition. Even the grotesque presentation of social and post-war stories is held in check by irony and concision, while the powerful stories, "Smitty" (1966/1976), closely related to "Der Missetäter" and "Das Sterben der Pythia" (1976), a witty argument against Brecht, the Lessing-like parable "Abu Chanifa und Anan ben David" (1976), above all, the beautifully abstract shape of "Der Sturz" (1971), in which the misinterpreted absence of a member plunges the anonymous Politbüro of a totalitarian state into a ludicrous disorientation, reveal a mastery of prose narrative which will astonish those who know Dürrenmatt only as an author of idiosyncratic detective stories.

It is characteristic of Dürrenmatt's working method that he constantly revises and reworks his themes and texts. All the major variants are listed in this edition. For example, the original fourth act of *Romulus der Große*, the two conclusions of the "gangster opera" *Frank der Fünfte* (1959) and the original final scene of *Der Meteor* are set out in appendices. Dürrenmatt's unpublished (and unperformed) first play, *Komödie* (1943), is printed under the expressionist title *Unterwegs und Neues Leben*, and there is a new and particularly caustic stage version of the radio play *Abendmahl im Späthort* (1956), entitled *Dichthausdämmerung*. With the exception of the early plays, *Als stehl geschrieben* and *Der Blinde*, the two "practice pieces for actors", *Play Strindberg* (1969) and *Porträt eines Planeten* (1970), and *Die Pause* (itself a reworking of the original short story and radio play of 1956), all the other dramas have been stylistically polished for this edition and given - in Dürrenmatt's words - "a final literary form, which takes into account the various working days used in the theatre. In addition, Dürrenmatt has included a number of dramatic fragments with illuminating commentaries and a significant amount of hitherto unpublished narrative and essayistic material which establishes the edition as an indispensable reference work for specialist and general reader alike.

The decisive shift of emphasis in Dürrenmatt's work towards prose and philosophy, detectable around the mid-1970s, can be seen as the result of his severe disenchantment with the theatre. Despite the enormous success of *Play Strindberg*, it was not perhaps surprising that Dürrenmatt's increasingly bleak view of the interaction of individual and society since *Der Meteor* should find little echo at a time when literature and the theatre were becoming more and more political grounds for the political ground as the final test-case of Western civilization. Above all, this courageous, but far from uncritical, essay acknowledges the catastrophic impact on German culture - and thus on Dürrenmatt's own - of the "arch-blunderer" Hitler and his Final Solution. The book follows the novel pattern of the *Minutier-Komplex*: theology, philosophy, history, language criticism and poetic parable - the "Abu Chanifa und Anan ben David" story, for example, first appears in this context - are woven into an acute analysis of the

Nietzschean exchanges

By R. J. Hollingdale

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE:

Briefwechsel Edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari

Volume II, 5. 499pp. 3 11 007678 0 Volume II, 6. 882pp. 3 11 007680 2 Volume II, 6.2. 608pp. 3 11 008172 5 Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

The Colli-Montinari edition of the Nietzsche correspondence marches magnificently on. We have now reached the period January 1875 to December 1879 - the period of the last of the *Untimely Meditations* and the first two volumes of *Human, All Too Human*. Volume 5 contains Nietzsche's letters of this time, again in excellent reproduction, and again cross-referred to the letters from his

correspondents to which they are a reply or which are a reply to them. The letters are contained in the two-part Volume 6: letters from Elizabeth and Franziska Nietzsche, Cosima and Richard Wagner, Albert Brenner, Malwida von Meysenbug, Von Gersdorff, Rphide, Mathilde Maier, Marie Baumgartner, Romundt, Eduard Schuré, Paul Rée, Köstlin, Schweitzer, Von Seydlitz, Rüchli, Overbeck, Dr. Elser, Gabriel Monod, Louise Ott - from virtually all the people familiar to the student of Nietzsche's life during these years.

There are two brief letters from a Basel lady with the resonant name of Charlotte Kestner. The decision to publish these letters to Nietzsche, and to bring out the volumes containing them at the same time as those containing Nietzsche's letters of the same period, so that the reader can read them as a single series, was very obviously the right one: Nietzsche's world returns to life through these letters.

The *Minutier-Komplex* begun a series of prose compositions - a crucial forerunner was the *Monstervortrag über Gerechtigkeit und Recht* of 1959 - which add up to a "new" Dürrenmatt. In the same year appeared *Zusammenhänge. Essay über Israel* which evolved out of Dürrenmatt's visit to Israel in 1975.

Against the sombre backdrop of Auschwitz, Dürrenmatt argues forcefully for Israel on existential rather than political grounds as the final test-case of Western civilization. Above all, this courageous, but far from uncritical, essay acknowledges the catastrophic impact on German culture - and thus on Dürrenmatt's own - of the "arch-blunderer" Hitler and his Final Solution. The book follows the novel pattern of the *Minutier-Komplex*: theology, philosophy, history, language criticism and poetic parable - the "Abu Chanifa und Anan ben David" story, for example, first appears in this context - are woven into an acute analysis of the

desperate need to recognize the interdependence of Jewish, Christian and Muslim culture. A series of "Nachgedanken", written specifically for this edition, extend the argument to the "secular religion" of Marxism and measure all fear against the bettered ideas of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.

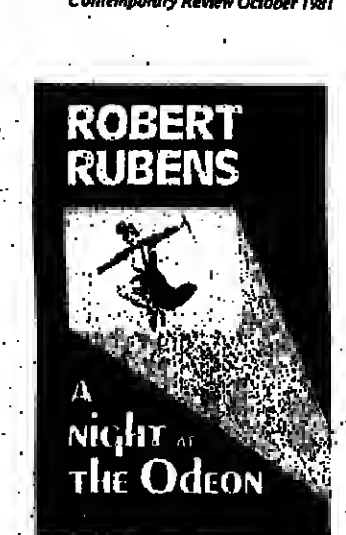
Dürrenmatt has described this book as a second pan of a trilogy, beginning with the *Minutier-Komplex* and to be concluded with a vast project that he has been working on for over ten years: *Stoffe. Zur Geschichte meiner Schriftstellerei*. The first three books of the latter - there are probably to be six in all - are scheduled to appear this autumn in one volume under the title *Der Winterkrieg im Tibet*.

In another major essay, "Über Toleranz" (1977), this most paradoxical of writers, who in the past has charted so uncompromisingly the collapse of humanist ideals, pleads for a new Enlightenment. Against the tradition of Hegel, Marx, Lenin and Mao, Dürrenmatt sets the thought of Lessing, Kant, Kierkegaard and Popper - that is, men who put individual before theory, moral freedom before determinism, personal revolt before political revolution. Kierkegaard, in particular, can be seen to play an important role for Dürrenmatt. True to his own concept of "dramaturgical thinking", the Swiss sceptic is well aware of his need for the Danish theologian; just as faith without doubt degenerates into dogma, the possibility of faith prevents his own doubt from petrifying into ideology.

These latest works - which include a substantial essay on Albert Einstein (1979) - move with astonishing assurance between narrative fiction, historical analysis, philosophy and science. They reveal a Dürrenmatt with a depth of speculative power and a range of cultural knowledge that the novels and plays alone do not convey. The battle against emotional and intellectual impoverishment is still being waged - but with highly differentiated means.

The Labyrinth remains the central, compelling metaphor, but the warning against the Minotaur in all its guises is both clearer and more insistent. Preferring the exploration of challenging riddles to the prescription of simplistic solutions, Friedrich Dürrenmatt continues to confront the world with impressively imaginative alternatives.

"... a remarkable talent for unabashed comedy... Robert Rubens, the nonagenarian Mrs. Poland deserves a place in the gallery of elderly autocrats alongside Marjorie's." Contemporary Review October 1981



An elegant and amusing novel about the writer and the cabaret singer by the author of *The Curious Minutier*. Published 2nd October 1981. ISBN 0 8594 106 5 £5.95

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Uncorking the Muse

By Dan Davin

DONALD NEWLOVE:

Those Drinking Days
Myself and Other Writers

177pp. Junction Books. £5.95.
0 86245 030 6

At heart this book is a temperance treatise, rather than a tract against alcohol and its perils for writers: a tract because it is wholesale in condemnation, but weak in analysis, the search for causes, showing no knowledge of the work of people like Dr Kenneth Dewhurst in this country or Professor Don Goodman in the United States who have written acutely and objectively about writers such as Baudelaire, Poe and Scott Fitzgerald in articles for specialist journals. This book works from the experience of the self outwards; and becomes more superficial the further it moves away from the author himself as his own special case.

The structure reflects this weakness: the first section, two-thirds of the whole book, is a selective autobiography, an account of how, for many years, Donald Newlove tried to be both a drinker and a writer and, indeed, considered the two roles essential to each other. The title of this section is "Drunkspare", the author's name for himself in this deluded phase, and the name is an index to the tone. (Maddeningly, given the number of people referred to throughout, there is no index of the other kind.) The last third of the book, its second and final section, is entitled "Little Dreamland" and, concentrating on the excessive use of alcohol as the key factor, rapidly traverses the careers of the other writers mentioned collectively in the sub-title of the book and mostly listed below it on the dust-jacket: a roll-call of the famous names of American writers of the twentieth century, or at least of those writers who drank and who are - with one exception - safely, or perhaps not so safely, dead. As Mr Newlove says at the outset: "This book is about writers who drank, went mad and are dead." In the excitement of this rhetoric he has forgotten the living exception.

No doubt Newlove would justify the length of his opening and predominantly autobiographical section on the ground that it constitutes his credo as the writer, and that in the second section, to not discuss, but rather judged without trial on the basis of their alleged alcoholism rather than in terms of the works which make them worth thinking about at all.

So we began with an *ex parte* credo. But the experience related, the confession, is self-indulgent, in the excessive repetition of *me ipso, mea maxima culpa*. Conversely, too much has been left out. One has the embarrassed sense of listening to some relatively sophisticated sinner at a revivalist meeting or at a Moral Re-orientation session, where the question remains open which is more distasteful, the sinner's confession or the sermon that is to follow.

The concentration on the disasters inflicted by alcohol upon himself and those dependent on him also means that, as autobiography, the section is unbalanced. If we are to be told as much as he insists on telling us about what was awful in what he did and was, we ought to be given rather more about what was good in that reprobate former self - just as he should not annoy us by telling how dreadfully overweight he was at times of excess without indicating what his height was. And we need a more straightforward, less apocalyptic, narrative with a few more unloading facts and dates and a clearer chronological structure.

In spite of this shortcoming, "Drunkspare" is nevertheless too long. For it leaves little room for the "Other Writers" of the title in the remaining section, "Little Dreamland". I have never read Mr New-

love's three published novels but am prepared to atone for this culpable negligence - the moral note is catching - by assuming that they may be reasonably talented or even good. But, even should this be so, does the space he devotes to himself in "Drunkspare" provide as much interest as we might have got from a fuller and more balanced account of writers like Hemingway, Faulkner, Scott Fitzgerald and the rest, such as the title seems to promise? I do not think so.

It is not merely a question of space: most of the writers he names are dealt with summarily, and one has a feeling of underlying resentment, jealousy even, on the part of the ostensible mourner. He indicates them as gods who failed him, although it was he who allotted them the role of deity, and in his concentration on the respects in which he considers them to have failed, all the failure is attributed to alcoholism - except for poor Marquand who seems to be excused for not having been alcoholic enough. And, although there is a superficial appreciation of what they did, there seems to be a subconscious grudge that even though he himself drank as much if not more than they did, they were better than he as writers.

Nor is it very clear how well he knew them personally, apart from what they wrote. Only on Tennessee Williams and Robert Lowell does he expatiate in a way that shows he had at least met them. Even then, however, the meetings as he recounts them hardly suggest intimacy. His contacts with Williams seem to have been occasioned by his determination to write an article on him and they are not without elements of the ludicrous. True, his quarry at this period was in a particularly elusive phase and it may therefore have been inevitable that Newlove should have had to rely chiefly on the gossip of his entourage, but one is left feeling that a closer relationship between the two writers is being implied than really existed.

A similar uneasiness arises when it is the turn of Robert Lowell. Here what we are given is mainly an account of an evening at the home of Lowell and his wife Elizabeth. Newlove and his wife had strived with a Chilean editor and his wife to help interpret of a literary interview. They were under the impression that they had been invited for dinner but this seems to have been, or become, a misunderstanding. So Newlove's party had a Barmecide feast while the other guests dined more substantially. The set conversation piece which follows is rather well done but has the flavour of the fabled rather than of fact. The talk about Shakespeare's *Tempest* is oddly reminiscent of the conversation in Joyce's *Ulysses* about *Homer*; and, unless Mr Newlove has a tape-recorder memory (or had a tape-recorder), he could hardly have reproduced the dialogue, though no doubt it took place on some such general line, giving the *ipsum verba* as he purports to do. Nene the less the reconstruction, if that is what it is, is interesting, though again a closer relationship with Lowell seems to be implied than perhaps actually existed.

The whole second section (and the book ends with a threnody in luxuriant prose for Lowell), but behind the lament one senses a desire: Newlove's own self - "Drunkspare" as well as Soberspare - has been using the book, and its message, not just to overthrow his gods but to triumph over them in life and in morality.

At one point to the Lowell conversation piece, Newlove is asked by Elizabeth Lowell whether he writes poetry and he replies: "Oh, yes. But it takes six months after writing prose to get your head saturated again for poetry. And then you can't write prose because you're over-coming all the lines - they take forever." This brings us to the question of his style, much praised in the blurbs but to my eye as a tedious, factory amalgam of poetic prose and prosaic poetry, overblown, with the garble of Greenwich Village colloquialism and sometimes more ambitiously providing the verbal

equivalent of "Old Purple", a drink once the main staple of the wine-forn Newlove. It is also noticeable that Drunkspare's style closely resembles that of Soberpare; so that, in one respect at least, the stern struggle to total abstinence has made very little difference. Only in the rare passages of recalled dialogue does the author escape from over-vehement, vagueness or obscurity.

In one of his few digressions from the American scene, Newlove brings up the powerful artillery of Dr Johnson in support of the contention that booze is bad for you. Typically, however, it is only one side of Johnson that is represented. There is no sign of that other Johnson who, in his late sixties, is recorded by Boswell as remarking: "There is nothing which has yet been contrived by man, by which so much inebriation is produced as by a good tavern or inn." The failure which the omission implies, to look at the pros as well as the cons of alcohol, is typical.

It also perhaps accounts for the author's not tackling other questions which his book raises in the reader's mind. Why is it that some distinguished writers have written well without drinking at all - Bernard Shaw, for example - or drinking only in a moderate and civilized way - Joyce Cary, for example? What changes take place in a writer's use of alcohol as he gets older and why? Are poets, as Newlove seems to suggest, particularly vulnerable to alcohol and, if so, why? And why has twentieth-century America produced so many writers of great talent who were also alcoholics? Could it have anything to do with the Volstead Act and the speak-easy drinks of the Prohibition period? Could it be that the drinks they drink tend to be more everproof than they are in other countries, so that habitual drinkers more readily succumb? Or has it something to do with the competitiveness, the emulation, of "the American way of life"? Why are Hemingway's letters, to take an egregious example outside Newlove's own account of himself, so full of the explicit desire to become "the champ" and talk of going twenty rounds (in the ring rather than in the bar, one assumes) with the meekbrother Tolstoy? Can it be that there is some confusion in the minds of some American writers between success in the art itself and success in terms of royalties and public acclaim; and that the stress caused by this competitiveness compels an increasing and undue resort to alcohol? Or is it, a vestige of frontier machismo: that even a writer must show that he is a weakling neither in life nor in letters?

By Jonathan Keates

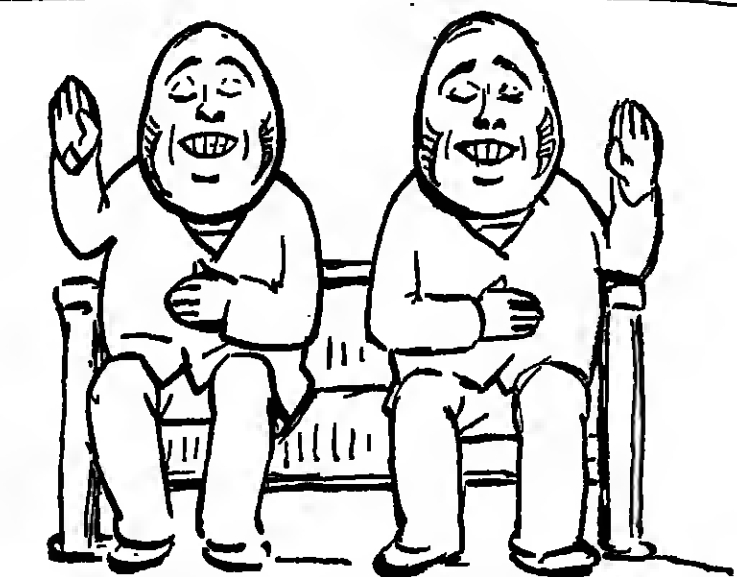
BRIAN REDHEAD and KENNETH McLEISH (Editors):
The Anti-Booklist
137pp. Hodder and Stoughton. £1.95 paperback.
0 340 27447 6

Years ago, during the 1960s, we were all quite unreasonably aghast at the prospect of a book by Brigit Brophy, Michael Levey and Charles Osborne called *Fifty Works of English Literature We Could Do Without*. The result, when it emerged, was curiously disappointing, the mere so as some of the works listed at, such as *Aurea Leigh* (new paradoxically making a well-merited comeback on the fides of feminist publishing), were ones which in those days nobody bothered to read anyway. Some sixteen years later here comes *The Anti-Booklist*, a far more toothsome proposition, fifty much-loathed authors steeped in a heady manna of concentrated bile, ratsbane and wormwood.

The range of choice is a crazy eclectic, and in certain cases the targets appear fascinatingly unaccountable. Does George MacBeth, for example, really hate the *OED* as bitterly as all that? The awfulness of Peter Tinniswood's chosen *Cage* and *Aviary Birds* by Richard Mark Martin is wholly lost on me: actually the "combustious; paradise whydahs, java sparrows, diamond doves, red-vented parrots, orange-cheeked waxbills, red-naped vireos, birds and Chinese painted quail" sound rather fetching. So does a novel called *The Monk* by Anne Scott-James about an aspiring magazine feature writer, which Audrey Slaughter says ruined her life (she coo co-edits the *Sunday Express Magazine*). And you'd be surprised, no, honestly, by the jeremiads of acrimony emptied over current works of reference. Down goes Shirley Conran's *Superwoman*, that dismal paean to obsessive drudgery, soused to vinegar by Polly Toynbee, while the timeless horrors of *Scouting for Boys* (including "how to stalk an emu with a boomerang in the hand and a spear between the toes") and the higher daintiness of *Who's Who 1980* both get a terse come-uppance.

Or again, may it be that the decade which was the culmination of romanticism in Europe at the turn of the century has lingered on in or come late to America, and that the self-destructiveness typical of decadence - and the destruction of form itself - the pursuit of originality - has been relayed by the characteristic American vigour, translating genius as an infinite capacity for taking pain and being thirstiest with the most, with the result that the consequent dissolution is so much more cataclysmic and picturesque than, say, the anaemic decline of an Ernest Dowson?

If our world and our culture survive, that; posterity will console Hiroshima an artist could console himself by counting on will be able to say what work has come best out of our time. No doubt the same principle will still hold that even a genius, when drunk, is a bore and that being a drunk and boring is, nevertheless, the proof of genius. The proof lies in the work itself, and the question of how many drinks it preceded the writing, accompanied it, or followed it will remain relatively trivial, of chief interest to those who prefer biography of authors to what they have written, or to medical specialists in pursuit of peripheral improvements to the human lot. Meanwhile, even if Mr Newlove's writers did drink too much - though they did not really become mad - they remain more interesting than the autobiography for which they are merely a pendant.



"Chapman & Hollis were not at all Mr. Chapman's year was year, and Mr. Hall's was year." G. K. Chesterton's drawing in *The Complete Clerihews* of E. Clivehew Bentley with an introduction by Gavin Ewan (145pp. Oxford University Press. £5.95. 0 19 212978 3), published this week. The book will be reviewed in a future issue of the TLS.

The unloved ones

By Jonathan Keates

BRIAN REDHEAD and KENNETH McLEISH (Editors):
The Anti-Booklist
137pp. Hodder and Stoughton. £1.95 paperback.
0 340 27447 6

The whole wizard wheeze was of course a gift to the parodists, led by Russell Davies, incomparable on *Fluorescent Woke* - "each it's an absolute codger of your hockmugardose chintable prankhearse, and all the fun in it is in the parting together" - Janice Elliott's Virginia-Vanessa epistle from Hell, and Hemingway (he gets in twice) done brown by Stanley Reynolds.

Much of the fun in these swipes and potshots comes from unconscious self-revelation - by the assailants themselves. I liked the implicit weakness of Caroline Cenar on *The Female Eunuch* and Patricia Beer's guilt-tinged assassination of Leavis. No one will tell Basil Boothroyd what the Turks did to Lawrence at Deraa, but Beryl Bainbridge, at her most implausibly winsome, concludes that "without Freud we could have lived out our shifty days in peace and filled our guilty nights with dreams". H. R. F. Keating and Charles Osborne (again) put their own books through the shredder, one with genuine embarrassment, the other with a slightly unpleasant buckishness. David Irving, choosing (wouldn't he?) Joachim Fest on Hitler, sounds batty and faintly sinister, a Carabosse at the feast, whereas Michael Schmidt treats *L'Immortelle* ("I do know one evil book. I wish I had not read it. I wish it could be unwritten") with a loftiness of tone and purpose whose incongruity is pungently refreshing.

Not every bullet finds its billet. Fay Maschler doesn't tell us enough about *The Pitkin Program for Diet and Exercise* to make it seem worth her gall. There is a laboriously unfunny piece by Charles Wood from which we are meant to unscramble a hatchet job on *Vile Bodies*, and a disappointingly limp indictment of *The Guinness Book of Records* from Sheridan Morley. But it is good to be reminded of the way in which certain *ecchi* ghastlies of the last decade have managed to acquire a certain period authenticity. Remember, for example, *Portrait of a Marriage* - "I will show you madness, Vita, (madness, do you hear?) - or the girl lying her hair in the sun-mirror by the San Diego freeway in Reynier Banham's *encomium of Los Angeles*.

Since there's a weekly compulsion quality about this jolly little stocking present, a prize to King's *Arthur and his Knights*, so Antonio Fraser pens account why slobbers over her "carcass of legal lamb that has been hung for four; eleven or eighteen days" (Windermere) not to mention the "hortobagel (sic) package with sploach" (Greek Street) and "ber-long, dank, unwashed head bent over the pottery plate; ethnic beads clanking with the chopsticks" (the *Gardian*-reading female (or indeed possibly male) social worker raises Trotsky-ically her "somesa, blisio and mung, dhal balls" (London N.W.10) to her lips chapped from shouting a thousand shouts against police oppression at that day's demo.

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The semiotician in the wardrobe

By Philip Thody

PILIPPE PERROT:

Les Dessus et les dessous de la bourgeoisie
Une histoire du vêtement au XIX^e siècle
Paris: Fayard.

In addition to being the only animal to write poetry, transform his habitat and massacre members of his own species, man is also unique in wearing clothes. From the fact that the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego dash around with nothing on in freezing temperatures, there seems to be a general agreement among anthropologists and social historians that we don't dress up to keep warm, and Philippe Perrot's *Les Dessus et les dessous de la bourgeoisie*. *Une histoire du vêtement au XIX^e siècle* does not query this surprisingly well-established view. Instead, it argues that clothes are the most obvious means whereby we exist in other people's eyes as well as in our own. And it adds two further themes to this essentially Sartrean vision: a Barthesian concern for the signs which we use to project our ideal self-image; and an almost Proustian awareness of how very difficult it is to achieve true elegance.

Though primarily conceived, as its sub-title indicates, as a historical account of how and why French women and men dressed in the nineteenth century, it becomes a fascinating and amusing examination of social attitudes. At the same time, it is a contribution to the semiology of everyday life which takes over where Barthes' *Système de la Mode* left off, and profits from a broader-minded and more eclectic approach than the one which led Barthes to restrict himself solely to the language in which fashion was discussed.

Were any sceptic to observe that the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego are unusual in not using clothes to protect themselves from the climate, and to supplement by reference to the bureau or the raincoat this common-sense view that we do dress for comfort as well as for appearance, he would still have to explain the extraordinary damage which nineteenth-century women did to their health by the garments they wore. For not only did they cover the rest of the body in layer after layer of clothes only to leave their fragile bosoms totally exposed to cold, illness and the prying eyes of men; they ruined their digestion and impaired their child-bearing capacities by wearing corsets. In 1861, 1,200,000 of these instruments of torture were sold in Paris alone, and the practice of using whale-bone or steel springs to produce the shape which fashion decreed desirable ended only when the shortage of manpower in the First World War created the need and opportunity for women to go out to work.

Perrot makes no secret of his debt to Theodore Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, and especially to his concept of conspicuous consumption. As men's fashions reflected the puritan ethic of work, sobriety and self-denial by becoming progressively duller and more uniform, they compensated by imposing on their wives the duty of proclaiming to the rest of society how rich and successful they were in their professional lives. The unyielding rigidity of the corset, like the capacious complexity of the crinoline and the crippling elegance of the high heel, made up a network of signs declaring the indisputable fact that a middle-class woman's husband made enough money to maintain her in total idleness.

Not, of course, that this idleness was in any way restful. Between 1840 and 1875, no less than sixty *Cédes de savoir-vivre* were published in France, and the extracts which Perrot quotes from them show that the French can provide as hilarious a spectacle of obsession with class distinctions as the English ever offered. Any woman, proclaimed Ernest Feytaud to 1873 in his *Art de Plaire, Étiquette d'hygiène, de goût et de toilette*, who "commits the crime of tying

her stockings below the knee is unfit to live", and her husband could find himself exposed to a comparable blame for a failure to dress correctly. "Even in the country", declared la Comtesse de Bassanville in *La Science du Monde. Politesse, Usages, Bien-Être* in 1859, "a nun who goes out wearing a cap looks like a servant, and shows himself thoroughly vulgar (un grossier personnage)". And, as Henri Despaigne's *Le Code de la Mode* made clear, you needed plenty of time if you were to be really *à la mode*.

A lady of good society who wishes to be well dressed for all possible occasions will need seven or eight changes of clothes for each day: a dressing-gown for the morning, riding habit for her morning excursion, an elegant negligé for luncheon, a toilette de visite, if she is going out for a drive, a second riding habit if she is going to the Bois, a long dress for dinner, which will naturally not be the one in which she goes to an evening reception or to the theatre.

Apart from a mention of the opposition to the corset which was one of the features of the women's liberation movement in its nineteenth-century embryonic phase, Perrot does not quote any evidence to suggest whether women enjoyed spending their time like this or not. Yet although any self-image which a nineteenth-century woman projected was one that a male-dominated society had imposed upon her, she was by no means uninterested in making herself uncomfortable in order to conform to an ideal but ludicrous concept of what she ought to look like. Her late twentieth-century sister who refuses to eat anything but celery and cottage cheese, or to drink anything but unsweetened lemon juice, is just as far from a rational attitude towards the relationship which should link bodily needs to social appearances, and has merely replaced the tunic of Nessus by the torments of Tantalus.

It is also rather odd, as Perrot observes, to note how our worship of adolescence has led us to regard the same style of dress - jeans and T-shirts - as equally desirable for anyone between six and sixty, and I hope myself that he will follow this book with a comparable study of how the clothes that we wear nowadays indicate the kind of society we inhabit, as well as the different roles which we expect the sexes to play. For it is equally curious to consider that we have, in one aspect at least of the way we dress, gone back to the period before the Middle Ages. Only from the twelfth century onwards, apparently, did men and women in Western Europe begin systematically to indicate which sex they belonged to by the kind of clothes they wore. It was not until the reign of the Valois kings, in the fourteenth century, that "the long surcoat in the form of an overall with no belt and falling in pleats right down to the ankles, worn hitherto by both sexes, began gradually to be given up by the men".

Were Perrot to look at twentieth-century dress with the same care that he has shown in dealing with the French equivalent of the Victorian period - it is the Second Empire which most attracts his attention - he would do us all a great service if he applied the insights of structuralism and semiology in a more systematic way. He is certainly aware of the contribution which Sausure and Barthes have made to the way we interpret appearances. One of the *Manuels of Correct Behaviour* which he quotes, by Mme la Comtesse de La Roche, the authors often have names like this, my favourite being la Comtesse Dab), insists that one should no more ask why such and such a social custom exists than why such and such a language uses the words, pronunciation and constructions it does. Both, argues this astutely aristocratic precursor of the genuinely aristocratic Ferdinand de Saussure, are equally arbitrary; and Perrot also shows himself a worthy successor to the fundamental idea put

forward in the *Cours de linguistique générale* when he argues that in fashion, as in language, meaning is produced only by differences.

Yet however original the Sausurean insight may have been for the study of language, it is an idea which has always been a truism as far as clothes are concerned. For since we dress as we do mainly in order to show that we must not be confused with the people in the class or age group next to us, it would be very odd to imagine fashion working in any other way. The problem is more one of discovering why fashions change, and how it is that particular styles of dress come to connote different class attitudes and social aspirations. And here it is hard to sympathize with Perrot when he seems - rather uncharitably - to give up any attempt at a rational explanation. He writes that "skirts became short because they had been long, hair long because it had been short", and it is surprising to find such a blint acceptance of time and chance in what is otherwise such a well argued hook of historical analysis.

For although one may agree that it is dangerous to try to establish any "systematic equivalence between a form and its historical context", the actual information contained in *Les Dessus et les dessous de la bourgeoisie* suggests that the signs used in the language of fashion are a good deal more motivated than the linguistic signs with which one is sometimes tempted to compare them. They are, for example, far more obviously dependent on what happens elsewhere in society. Perrot himself points out that while became fully established as the conventional sign for virgin purity in a bride only when two apparently disparate factors came together: the greater quantity of white cloth made available in the French provinces in the mid-nineteenth century by the newly established *grands usinages*; and the proclamation, in 1854, of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. For although the equation white = purity is arbitrary in a purely philosophical sense (white is said to be the colour of mourning in China; a society thoroughly based on the virtues of *la négligence* might well insist that brides wear black), it has little of the arbitrary and ultimately inexplicable quality inseparable from the linguistic sign.

However irrational fashion may be when looked at with the cold eye of common-sense (the Ascot topper and the punk rocker's safety-pins are equally ditty if you are thinking in utilitarian, rationalist or even aesthetic terms) it is not impossible to understand once you replace the signs in context. Perrot is very good at this, and one of his remarks about the impact of good, mass-produced, made-to-measure clothes on the aristocratic behaviour of the upper class in late nineteenth-century France casts an interesting light on one splendid custom observed by the narrator of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. For one can understand why the gentlemen making an afternoon call on Mme de Villeparisis carefully placed their toppers upright on the floor when one reads that:

The whole elegance of aristocratic simplicity lies in this distance towards what one has acquired, this casual attitude towards one's possessions - itself the supreme possession - which is in absolute contrast to the newly arrived members of society, whose triumphant attitude towards what they have betrays them by compensation for the privations they have undergone.

Indeed, it will be remembered from *Le Côté de Guermantes* that the "historien de la Fronde" shows his lack of breeding by being afraid that the hats might get damaged, and with Bloch kneeling over vases of flowers as though he were the Reverend H. P. (Stinker) Pinker himself, the risk was certainly there. But however arbitrary this sign of social ease may have been, there is nothing inexplicable about it, and the more one tries to work out a semiology of

everyday life in the terms used either in the *Cours de linguistique générale* or in *Système de la Mode*, the more important does a careful definition of just exactly what is meant by terms such as "arbitrary", "motivated" or "natural". For I very much doubt whether there are people who think that the way they dress is wholly natural, and whether anybody is ever taken in by what Perrot calls "a way of talking about fashion which tries to convince us that a hat, a scarf or a fur coat serve to protect us or to improve our appearance, but without openly acknowledging that they function as distinctive differences or statutory signs, just as wigs or red heels did in days gone by".

To what extent this is a straw man is a question which needs to be answered before Saussure's ambition of constituting semiology as the "science which studies how signs behave in social life" can be completed in the form which he and others have suggested it might be given. For if nobody needs anything more than the very slightest nudge to make them realize that the habit always does proclaim the man, and that the simplest jumper expresses social values in just as conventional a way

as does the most elaborate crinoline, then much of the minimal fervour which informed *Système de la Mode* and which recurs from time to time in *Les Dessus et les dessous de la bourgeoisie* - is misplaced. For there is more than a purely verbal edification in the concept of "the semiology of everyday life". Once you have been made aware of how your day-to-day actions may be influenced by unconscious factors, your start being a good deal more suspicious of what you think, say or do. And once you have been told that everything you wear is a sign, you have even more hesitation in deciding whether to wear the blue suit with the thin red stripe or the heather-mixture tweed.

Bourgeois, Sans-culottes, and other Frenchmen: Essays on the French Revolution in Honor of John Hall Stewart, edited by Morris Slavin and Agnes M. Smith (151pp. Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press. \$9.50. 0 88920 097 1), includes essays on Lafayette, on Conrad-Alexandre Gérard, on the intellectual origins of Babouvism, on the effect on the Revolution of the struggle in section Roi de Sicile between monarchists and republicans, and on the state of morals during the period.

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THE HOGARTH PRESS

commentary

The old new German cinema

By Stephen Plaice

German Film Season
National Film Theatre

It is significant that not one of the seven major directors discussed in John Sandford's recent study *The New German Cinema* was represented in the second German season at the NFT. Fassbinder, Wenders, Schlöndorff, Herzog, having opted for bigger productions and a more commercial and international market, can no longer be the darlings of the art circuit. What was supposedly on view here was the new wave of young and apprentice directors, the new New German Cinema, now that the old masters have sold out and gone west. But what quickly became apparent as this eclectic, derivative succession of films unfolded was that this was not a new wave at all, only the trough which follows the talented generation of film-makers which emerged in the 1970s.

The paucity of new ideas was nowhere more apparent than in the grandiloquently advertised "Symposium" in mid-week, at which the discussion quickly degenerated into speculation about American box-office profits and vanishing royalties from Fassbinder's and Schlöndorff's more recent films. Understandably perhaps, the preoccupation seemed to be more with the success of the previous generation than with the potential of any rising talent. Not one of the films actually shown in the season was even cursorily discussed.

The spokesman for the new avant-garde was Werner Schroeter, whose pretentious and repetitive film-account of last year's alternative theatre festival in Nancy, *Dress Rehearsal*, we had just endured. As in the film, into which he plumpily inserted himself and his vision of a decaying Germany, Schroeter seemed much occupied with his own personality and achievements. "Do you like Syberberg and how has he influenced you?" "I don't like him, and I influenced him", came the reply. Schroeter used the discussion as a platform to air his grievances against the subsidy system in Germany in general, and against the state of Bavaria in particular. Schroeter, like a number of the other directors in this season who had made use of television money or subsidies from the city of Berlin or the state of Bavaria, seemed intent on biting the hand that feeds him - and by British standards so generously.

A general deprecation of the Bundesrepublik was the undercurrent of most of the films screened. Politicians, doctors, teachers, psychiatrists, social workers and, of course, the ubiquitous police force all came in for some stick at some time during the week. We had to wait until Saturday for the full-blown conspiracy theory. It came in Bernhard Sinkel's thriller *Pui on Ice*, where a teacher is suspended from work for challenging the activities of the secret service. The secret agents were dressed uniformly in grey leather trenchcoats and trilbies so that they could easily be distinguished from the rest. The film was a tendentious treatment of the very real problem of "Berufsschweiger" - exclusion from certain professions by certain Linder of those who hold anti-constitutional views. The authorities, as usual, were on a hiding to nothing. Even the mayor of Berlin (or was he the Minister of Education?) did not know exactly who was controlling the secret service. By the end of the week I was beginning to get the feeling that the only true democracy in Germany is amongst film-directors.

The most penetrating (because implicit) criticism of the ailing materialism of the Bundesrepublik came in the only documentary film of the

season, *Monarch*. This is the engaging portrait of a man who has discovered a foolproof system for milking the Mint's particular model of gambling machine. Driving around Germany in his Mercedes, alerted to the whereabouts of fresh Mints by a network of "vultures", Monarch is desperately trying to amass a fortune before the Mint is superseded. There are indications that the manufacturers and bar-owners are getting wise to him. The Mint is gradually being replaced. Although he usually keeps a low profile while emptying the slots (especially difficult with a camera trained on him), Monarch can also become a kind of folk-hero for sympathetic clientele who are only too pleased to see someone at last defeat the greedy machine.

This year's Federal Film Prize was won by Adolf Winkelmann for the second part of his Ruhr trilogy, *Jede Menge Kohle*. It concerns a miner, Katlewski, who mysteriously emerges in Dortmund having walked underground from the pits at Recklinghausen and set about shocking and humiliating his fellow workers. Katlewski, played with monotonous cool by Delle Quandt, is the Easy Rider of the Ruhrgebiet. He has such an arrogant contempt for money and materialist aspirations that one almost finds oneself sympathizing with the ordinary work-shackled lives which this adolescent film pokes fun at. There is a neat little double standard here. Winkelmann makes cheap fun of a family delightedly switching on their new music centre, while in the credits his own film proudly

boasts its Dolby stereo credentials. At the end of the film Katlewski mercifully returns down the pit. He claims it is the only real way out. Nobody seems anxious to stop him disappearing once more into the ground. The two most creditable narrative films of the season deal with the disintegration of families. *Lena Rais* by Christian Rischert presents a convincing portrait of a housewife attempting to emancipate herself from a brutal husband, whose final desperation brought to mind the end of *Alice*, when the monster refuses to be ousted from the spacecraft. The theatre director Luc Bondy's first film, *The Orrible Women*, opens with a tableau of a grieving family, based on Edward Munch's picture "The Death Room". The father of a respectable, close-knit family has died. Unable to cope, the family implodes and the elder daughter Josephine assumes authority. Her incontinent madness enables her to dominate the other members of the family. An incestuous relationship develops between Josephine and her brother, Walter. But terrified by the prospect of Walter's marrying and going off to lead his own life, Josephine insists that the family move to an isolated house in the country, and persuades the subservient younger daughter to help her imprison Walter in the cellar. The script is reminiscent of Strindberg. Indeed the whole thing might have worked better on stage: paroxysms of the static Munch-inspired poses jar to the more fluid medium of film.

Extramural inactivity

By Andrew Hislop

Memoirs of a Survivor
ABC Cinemas

"Perhaps, in describing as I have done what went on among ourselves, in our neighbourhood, I have not been able to give a clear enough picture of how our by now very remarkable society worked", says Doris Lessing's narrator towards the end of *Memoirs of a Survivor*, her bizarre, powerful story of a woman living in the near future in a country reduced to barbarism and decay. She is, and David Gladwell's brave but flawed film makes it little clearer.

Lessing's narrator divides her time between observing Emily, a girl left in her care who falls in love with Gerald, the leader of a gang; and exploring another, mystic realm "behind" the wall of her flat, where Emily is a child in a strict, Victorian household. How people picture integration and abnormal mutation reveals how they conceive the normal order of things. Lessing's treatment of social decay is done through the internal speculation of an individual subject. (She describes *Memoirs* as "an attempt at autobiography"). But her narrator's description and analysis of her society is limited. We are offered splatterings of generalization about human behaviour which fuse the condescending felicitous of Hampstead liberalism with the gibb avatars of sub-Desmond Morris mao-watching.

We learn that much social intercourse took place in the community: "We... ourselves spent hours every day talking and listening to talk", but we are given very few examples of direct or indirect speech. This may be because the narrator, who refers to the "deprived, thin speech of the poor", has difficulties in comprehending the speech of the lower orders - "I could hardly understand her", her account was so degraded. She is more sure of her ground, though, when dealing with other worlds: "We are given an account of how, beyond the wall, she

was "in a continuing relation to the invisible destructive creature... just as I was with the other beneficent presence", and how to enter the personal, there, was "to enter a prison, where nothing could happen but one saw happening", as opposed to the impersonal where "there was a lightness, a freedom, a feeling of possibility". Spanning the divide between this and the other world is a long, loose musling about "it", a part of everyday language that she does understand (as in her examples "Have you heard anything about it?") but also "the secret theme of all literature and history", the word for "helpless ignorance" and "perhaps - on this occasion to history... a consciousness of something ending".

The film of *Memoirs* abandons the narrative role of the central character (Julie Christie) without substantially elucidating the society in which she lives. Miss Christie, spared the tribulations of grappling with the thin verbal contributions of the poor, speaks rarely and then almost exclusively with Emily (Leeona Mellin), who has received from some above-standard English; and Gerald (Christopher Guard), who for a piper-paedophile and self-appointed social worker extraordinaire has almost rounded tones. She is reduced to a passive observer, inactive not only in this world but also beyond the wall, where in the book the narrator is prone to more freetric involvement. We are given one of her thoughts about the personal, too even an aside on "it".

Unfortunately, Gladwell does not balance this playing down of the personal with much lightness, freedom, or sense of the impersonal, either. Deprived of the imaginative force of Lessing's fiction, the opening half of the film suffers from a one-sided languor, elevated only by the curiosity which Miss Christie's physical appearance provokes. Adorned with an elongated russet wig and shot at times to emphasize her limited stature, she seems to alternate, between the middle-aged figure depicted in the book, and a child. The significance of this is no

Nonetheless, this effective debut was one of the successes of the season.

Veith von Fürstberg's *Tristan and Isolde*, the commercial centrepiece of the season, at least avoids the vulgarities and anachronisms of filmed legends like *Excalibur*. The source of Fürstberg's script is unclear: he conveniently ascribes it to "the legend". It certainly contains elements of Gottfried von Strassburg's and of Thomas's versions, but the plot has been ruthlessly modernized and streamlined to provide a strong linear narrative. Unfortunately, the youthful casting of the lovers prevents any real sense of passion from ever being engendered, let alone sustained for two sad half hours. There is no Wagner to stir the breast either, instead a flute and a saxophone which somehow complement the rather subdued performances by the teenage lovers. Legends of this kind require a more adventurous and resonant treatment than a realistic, linear narrative can provide.

The latter part of the week was well enough attended to suggest there is sufficient interest in the German cinema to warrant making the season an annual event. Major films by Fassbinder (*Lola*, based like *The Blue Angel* on Heinrich Mann's *Professor Unrat*), Schlöndorff, Herzog and Wenders will be appearing at the NFT shortly. On the evidence of the films shown this year, it is still to the work of these directors that we must look for the New German Cinema.



"The Virgin of Sorrows", ascribed to Pedro de Mená (1628-88): one of the works in the National Gallery's exhibition, El Greco to Goya: The Taste for Spanish Paintings in Britain and Ireland, which will be reviewed shortly in Commentary.

Banged up

By Nicholas Shrimpton

Caritas
Cottesloe Theatre

Arnold Wesker has gone back to his roots - to Norfolk, that is, and to a heroine who stands up to her wrath and shakes her fist at the society which made her. What is new about this latterday Beatie Bryant is chiefly the period in which she is set. Christine Carpenter is the daughter of a carpenter and lives in the England of the late fourteenth century. The creed by which she is simultaneously enlightened and betrayed in accordingly Christianly rather than socialist or intellectual culture. And if her conclusion ("This is a wall, and this is a wall, and this is a wall...") seems more disillusioned than Beatie's ecstatic sense of "beginning", that is as much a reflection of the historical source as it is of Wesker's changing views.

The real Christine Carpenter became an anchoress, walled up in the church of the Surrey village of Shere, in 1329. Three years later she broke her vows and returned to the world. But her escape was brief. Whether willingly or not (Wesker presumes unwillingly), she went back to the church to live and die in her cell. Its cramped remains today provide an unexpectedly lurid experience for the tourist in rural Surrey. Wesker's new play seizes upon such puritan interest and adapts it to his own distinctive purposes.

This action is transferred chronologically to the era of the Peasants' Revolt and geographically to the Norfolk and geographically to the Norfolk and geographically to the Norfolk. Wesker writes with such ease ("Bliss! girl, what you doing becoming an anchoress then?"). He also, for reasons which are rather less clear, omits the dramatic events of Christine's escape and return. Once in her cell Christine is indeed trapped there, despite her failure to achieve the vision for which she had hoped and her growing sense of uneasiness for the ascetic extremities of the eremitical life.

Her fitness for Wesker is obvious enough, for she provides him with another chance to discuss the cooped but urgent aspirations of inert people to social and intellectual liberation. It's a dramatic topic for which, in recent years, Willy Russell has been making a determined takeover bid, and Wesker's return to it has the air of a man establishing his church as a priority. Christine enters the church as an escape from the stifling inanities of village life. Its monopoly of literacy - emphasized by frequent references

to Wydfield and the rise of the written vernacular - and its promise of supernatural illumination, attract an intelligent girl trapped in an unintelligent society as surely as Reithian high culture attracted Beatie Bryant. And the gradual realization that her escape is into an all too palpable prison provides a splendid irony to stiffen the sinews of the plot.

The trouble with *Caritas* is that, for all its excellence as an idea, it remains a dreadful play. The heroine, hidden from the audience by a large stone wall for two thirds of the evening, is obliged to communicate the delicate interior experiences of a contemplative solitary in the voice of a fairground Barker. Meanwhile the main stage is given over to a frigid costume drama. The faces of the poor are conscientiously ground by the apparatus of Bishop of Norwich, and Christine's father, clearly a good *Garden* reader, resists the payment of taxes which might fund the wars in France. John Madmen's direction does little to suspend our mounting disbelief. His peasants are not so much revolting as absurdly refined - delicate-handed middle-class boys making nervous stabs at a proletarian manner. Roger Lloyd Pack as William Carpenter, for example, looks more like an antique dealer than a chippy, and is obliged to play with his elaborately authentic tones in a way which makes one wonder what became of the Wesker who, in *The Kitchen*, could so convincingly dramatize work.

Only when these distractions have been cleared from the stage, in fact, does *Caritas* come to life. For the last scene the wall of the cell revolves, and we are allowed to be alone with the play's protagonist. Patti Love is a marvellous performer of characters in *extremis* and her account of Christine Carpenter, when she is finally allowed to give it unhindered by a mass of artificial stone, strikes just the right balance between fierce conviction and inept derangement. Her ability to suggest the humour, as well as the agony, of the mad shows us the qualities of mind and spirit which originally made Christine exceptional. Her desperate physical flutterings, like a wasp on a window-pane, speak volumes about the effect of prolonged solitary confinement. In this scene Wesker seems genuinely to have pushed on beyond Beatie Bryant to a questioning of the very nature of endeavour and fulfilment. But he has, of course, left it too late. A play set entirely within Christine Carpenter's cell, and spoken exclusively by her, might have been something. As it is, *Caritas* looks like *A Man For All Seasons* rewritten by Edward Bond.

commentary

Living-room tragedy

By Peter Conrad

Othello
BBC TV
Otdn
English National Opera

Jonathan Miller has had productions of *Othello* and *Othello* on view simultaneously, though their juxtaposition serves to indicate how unlike the dramatic and operatic versions are and how, rather than insisting on similarities, the director must respect the differences imposed by their contradictory forms. This Miller has sensitively done for the Shakespeare play; with Verdi he is less successful, since his diagnostic intelligence mistrusts the excess and extravagance, even the very noise of opera. The medium of television aids his *Othello* of any tendency to operatic rhetoric. In all his BBC Shakespeare productions, Miller has been tacitly aware of the way in which the medium must necessarily mute and miniaturize the plays. Television domesticates whatever it transmits, since its theatre is not a rowdy Elizabethan arena or a gilt and velvet opera house but a living room, and what happens on the screen must adjust itself to the manners of those who are seated in front of it. For a start, this dampens the megaphonic mighty line of Shakespearean verse. Even that most cacophonous of plays, *The Taming of the Shrew*, had its decibels tuned down in Miller's production last year, and was set in a tiled Flemish interior as sedative as a padded cell. The characters in his *Othello* also speak with a considerate softness, as if conscious that they are - as the American television hosts used to say smarmily in the 1950s - guests in our homes.

As the hero, Anthony Hopkins refuses to relish the language. He enunciates in an unperturbed middle voice, a register proper to an Othello who is no wild man but a civil servant coupled with "the present business of the state". The lyrical indulgences are despatched by Hopkins in a brisk, embarrassed gabble. From him, "Keep up your bright swords or the dew will rust them" sounds more like helpful practical advice than the vainglorious handishing of a poetic self-invention becomes, for this Othello, a game in which his wearily consents to amuse his colleagues, who expect him to be an outlandish prodigy and can't accept the officious actuality: a smirk intimates that he's made up the anthropophagi, since this is the sort of fictional marvel expected from travellers and barbarians, and he serves up the reminiscence in the same spirit as the feats of sleight-of-hand he performs for his guests in Cyprus; likewise he seems to cunningly improvise the fables about the handkerchief to terrorize Desdemona, not believing in its arcane properties himself.

Hopkins, then, doesn't orate or emot, and he mutes the noises made by others. "Silence that dreadful bell", he orders after the brawl. Noise is offensive because it signifies falling self-control: in Miller's *sonno* voice production Cassio's remorse at his fustian uproar when drunk has a more than usual relevance. Doubting himself, Hopkins worries first about his maladjustment to this televisual world of undertones and implications. Perhaps, he thinks, he lacks those "soft parts of conversation" which are so much to be valued. With Desdemona he's reticent; not lyrically ecstatic.

Penelope Wilton's superb heroine is from the first grave, precise and quietly resolute; managing to get her way in the Saeote without raising her voice, and later tunefully humming the Willow Song under her breath, too aggrieved for the palliation of music. When she and Hopkins meet at Cyprus, she chuckles at his

romantic tropes, taken so much in earnest by Verdi's music, and the storm in this scene is as televisually understated, as politely self-deprecating, as the speaking of the verse. Instead of competing with Verdi's orchestral tumult, Miller places the characters safely indoors and hints at the tempest in the subdued chatter of a shutter or a distant sibilant of winds.

Silence sanctifies Othello's trust in Desdemona. He shushes her affectionately when she importunes him on Cassio's behalf and, when he sends her away, they exchange gestures of lip-locked pacification as if they were kisses. And when Miller's Othello does begin to rage, stamp and shout, he has lost possession of himself and lunged into epileptic mania. He's operatic in bearing and in diction only when deranged, and even then his frantic ravings are contradicted and criticized by the low key in which Bob Hoskins's Iago - unlike the Verdian baritone, who at this point engages in a lung-bursting vocal contest with the tenor - delivers "Witness you ever-burning lights above".

Interpretation of Shakespeare, for Miller, doesn't mean the ascribing of motives. It is simply a matter of policing diction and ensuring vocal mannerisms, persuading the actors to treat the verse as though it were prose.

So his *Othello* is true, earnest, and maybe a bit drab. Its originality lies in the anti-operatic sobriety with which it presents the main characters; Miller's psychological acuity and flair for mimicry are lavished on those Malvolio would call the lesser people - a fatuous squirearchical Brabantio, for instance, who organizes the search for the absconded Desdemona on the analogy of a fox hunt. Miller's *Othello* at the Coliseum shares these plain virtues, though to an opera house they tend to look starveling and meagre. The architectural frame of the action is spare and scrubbed, the storm an overcast murk, the parading crowd on the quay placid. But this homespun style suits the male protagonists. Charles Craig's Othello, dramatically phlegmatic and no longer a elation-throated, is moving precisely because he lacks the talent for tragic histrionics, being an ageing bureaucrat suddenly confronted with his own insignificance; Neil Howlett's admirable Iago is likewise a cosmic nihilist - sturdy, plausibly "honest", there's no glint of malice in his voice but instead a dour contempt for the operatic protestations of his betters.

The Coliseum's Desdemona, Rosalind Plowright, the best I've seen, is a less earthbound creature. When she sings, opera turns into a sublimation of drama, and character (as Verdi specified in a letter to Ricordi) transcends itself to become a type, a symbol "of goodness, of resignation, of sacrifice". But she's doubly hindered by the ENO production. In the first place she's made to appear among the crowd on the quay, which sabotages her later ethereal and angelic descent into the human affray when she's roused from her sleep, and also salla her with suspicion by having her cling to Cassio in her distress. Theo, in the third act finale, the company has substituted for the ensemble over which Desdemona pleadingly presides a scaled-down revision prepared by Verdi for Paris in 1894, giving equal prominence to Iago's sardonic asides. The change conforms with Jonathan Miller's approach, because it reduces this passage to conversational size. In origin, however, it's one of those Verdian occasions of almost apocalyptic geocentricity, when (in approximation to the *Requiem*) humankind raises its collective voice in imploring song, with Desdemona as the virgin intercessor for us all. By adopting the later alternative, the ENO has cheated a great Desdemona of what might have been her apotheosis.

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COMMENTARY

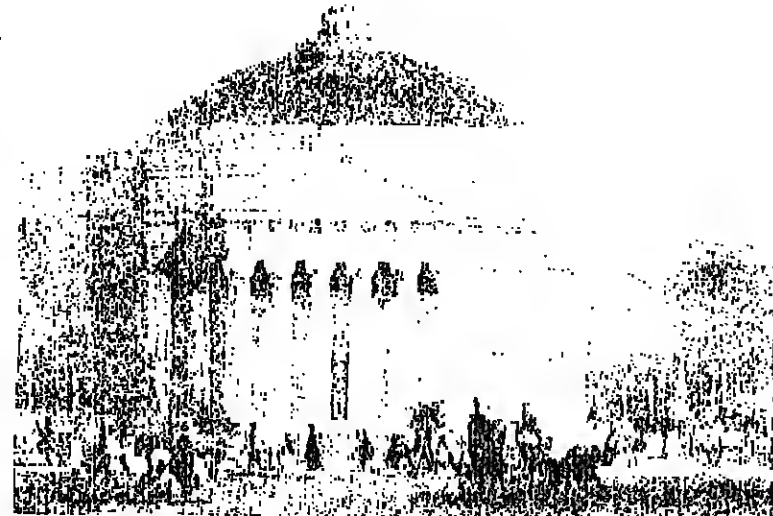
From the Athenaeum to the Zoo

By Gavin Stamp

Decimus Burton: His Life and Works
The Building Centre, 26 Store
Street, WC1

It is reassuring to learn that Decimus Burton really was the tenth child and that his name was not just a piece of Neo-Classical affectation by his father, James Burton, the speculative builder who was responsible for parts of north Blombury (around Burton Street) and who developed much of Regent Street and Regent's Park for John Nash. The young Decimus was launched early into the real world of architecture: he designed Cornwall and Clarence Terraces for Nash and soon built up a very successful practice. But although he was responsible for a number of the famous monuments of early nineteenth-century London - the Hyde Park Screen and Arch, and the Athenaeum - he is one of those architects who remain shadowy, and has never been treated to the biography or even the monograph he deserves. He is now properly celebrated in this Building Centre Exhibition, but the exhibits themselves reveal the paucity of documents - both letters and drawings - necessary to illuminate Burton's career further. Accompanying the exhibition is a useful catalogue, with a list of works, written by Philip Miller, the organizer (48pp, 47 black and white illustrations, £2.50); it ought to be the precursor of a fuller study.

Decimus Burton was surprisingly versatile. As well as designing Neo-Classical monuments, he worked with engineers to help create the marvellous glasshouses of early Victorian England: the Great Stove at Chatsworth (with Paxton) and the Palm Stove at Kew (with Richard Turner). A century before the Modern Movement catered for penguins and gorillas, Burton had animals for clients in Regent's Park and designed the Giraffe House, the Tuleur Camel House and the tunnel under the Out-



Decimus Burton's Colonnade, in Regent's Park. Built in 1828 to house a series of panoramic pictures of London, it had a dome bigger than that of St Paul's and contained one of the first public lifts. Thomas Hornor, whose idea it was, went bankrupt, but the building - with its conservatory, conservatory, refreshment rooms and Swiss chalet - survived as a palace of entertainment until it was eclipsed by the Great Exhibition. It was demolished in 1875, to be replaced by a terrace at Cambridge Gate.

er Circle (also, too small for elephants) in the London Zoo. The various lodges in Hyde Park are also his work - and the severe Greek Doric magazine for the Grenadier Guards by the Serpentine bridge is worthy of St Petersburg. Other London buildings by him include the Old Charing Cross Hospital off the Strand.

Much of the interest of this exhibition lies in its attention to Burton's less familiar work outside London, such as his "Old English" houses near Penshurst, of the 1830s, as well as his several estate developments. He added to his father's creation, the town of St. Leonards, laid out the Calverley Estate at Tunbridge Wells and was responsible for most of what was built at Fleetwood. This was a port and a watering place on the Lancashire coast founded by Sir Peter Hesketh Fleetwood. The

series of events during the early years of the Chinese take-over of Tibet when former "undesirables" were often given power over their superiors, sometimes with results far more terrible than those shown here. The two acts mirror one another. In the first, Dorje encounters the rigidity of traditional law and suffers the consequences. In the second, after a period of internecine and revenge-taking, the basic chauvinism of the Han soldiers emerges. Under pressure their Maoist idealism gives place to the simple reflexology of frightened colonialists everywhere. Dorje, truly fascinated by the technology of the new world brought by the soldiers and reasonably expecting a good place in it, now finds himself more or less a serf again but with new and less sensitive masters. His own identity is once more questioned and threatened. Is he to join the reactionary and affirm his Tibetan self or is he to work for the "revolution" of the new life and the ideology of Mao? In the final scene, a confession upon the roof which he and an exhausted pair of fellows are forced to build for Chinese military reasons, he responds to a plea to speak. We realize that this simple peasant has learnt the double talk of his masters and can use it against them. He throws them a skilfully innocent question: "My main mistake is a failure to question and understand. Who is this road for? Why have we decided to build it? ... Is it for the people? Who are the people? ... I should ask these questions more often and out loud ... The Chinese stand motionless as the play ends.

The powerful first act is enlivened by songs from traditional Tibet - the love poetry of the sixth Dalai Lama

Avant - gardening

By Frances Spalding

John Lessore
Theo Waddington Gallery
Virginia Powell
Maclean Gallery
Janet Nathan and Vanessa Jackson
AIR Gallery

Given the diversity of contemporary art, it is natural to feel a certain bewilderment. The reduction in the number of art publications and the absence of any dominant avant-garde have removed an atmosphere of high professionalism and exchanged it for something more like that of a garden fête. Much is home-grown, traditional and easy. But even the more outré reflects a general tendency to trust personal experience more and theory less.

John Lessore is one artist whose reputation has resuscitated in this more inclusive climate. His landscapes descend from the Impressionists. They catch at informal scenes and are deliberately unemphatic; nothing is heightened for effect, nor does the handling make a display of skill. His most ambitious views are of Paris, its complex architecture radiating in all directions, but even here the motif is restrained, the grey sky flat and undramatic. Like certain of his landscapes, his Paris scenes evoke Picasso but lack that artist's sensitivity to light. Confined to sunless suburban gardens and domestic scenes, Lessore can appear homespun. Certain canvases are heavily reworked, their incrustations and emotive drawing reminiscent of Auerbach and Kossov, two artists at one time associated with his mother Helen Lessore's Beaux Arts Gallery. At Theo Waddington's, two of Lessore's best paintings are his largest: "Norfolk Firemen saving a Cottage" and "The Life Room, Norwich School of Art", both of which contain much buried information that is only slowly perceived. His "Life Room", with its forest of candel and

towering plaster casts, is urgently hampered, the absorption of the students reflecting his own, the whole a homage to the challenge of tradition.

Neatly, at the Maclean Gallery, Virginia Powell's small pictures are concerned with glimpses rather than the studied view. Whether at Arklingham or Chantry, in Stockwell or Greece she makes a highly wrought memento from the corner of a room, or an arbitrary still life. She works in a variety of media, skilfully extracting the full range of tone from etching and aquatint, but turns most often to pastel. This medium suits her illustrative talent and encourages more spontaneity than is found in her oils. With pastel or water-colour she hints rather than describes, seizing, for instance, on a Christmas decoration to suggest the tree on which it hangs. Her love of strong colour and concentrated pattern can give her pictures the intensity of miniatures.

Janet Nathan also responds to environment, in her case to the view of the river from her studio at Wapping Wharf. At the AIR Gallery in Rosebery Avenue she is exhibiting ten new mixed-media constructions, including "River Light - near Sea". Driftwood nestles in pools of fibreglass like hounds at sea; sand, grit and occasional touches of strong colour enliven the whole which cartwheels across one entire wall. Her recent work has a more relaxed and confident air than her previous spiky constructions based on the cruciform shape.

Her sensitivity to materials enables her to explore not only river and landscape allusions but also religious states of mind, as in the five-panel "Elegy". Meanwhile in the downstairs gallery Vanessa Jackson hurls round shapes and fever-chart lines into her large, brightly coloured abstracts, with such energy that to enter the room is to experience a visual assault. Their exuberance disguises the careful decisions that have gone into their making, for they retain a commanding presence even after the initial dazzle has faded.

the knife slit your nose." Perhaps it is this degree of mercy to his beloved that lends Dorje eventually to attempt an enactment of the Bardo funeral rite over the body of his former oppressor - an event which in the conjuring up of the spirit of old Tibet nicely balances and cancels his summoning of the demons - actualized as Chinese - earlier on.

These raisings of the spirit world give us a deep psychological theme characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism, which Lowe skilfully inserts into his play. He weaves in some profound yogic doctrine at the very point where the action is at its basest. The yogi, enjoying his women in so voluptuous a manner, is a well-known type in Tibetan spiritual writing. Our yogi, Kshang, with all the magnificence of a Falstaff in full flow, instructs Lowe's peasant midwife, while perched on a thunderbox mid-stage in a scene which is dramatically superb. If Dorje will but visualize his lady for long enough she will "appear" in flesh and blood before him. Then, to learn the secrets of demon control, Dorje must first give her over to the terrible imagination of Kashag to do what he will with her. The demons that she evokes do their own dreaming - and how the Tibetans may control them remains the hidden question at the end of the play.

With *Tibetan Inroads* the Royal Court provides an education for any one interested in the culture and political problems of this land. The pain of Tibet comes through despite fully as the road-makers struggle under arc lamps to the roar of a generator near the end. But one is left with a certain respect for the idealism of Chairman Mao - the tragedy is that he took people for granted.

Pushkin and Lermontov

Sir, - In his generous and thoughtful review of my *Talk about the Last Poet* (October 2), D. M. Thomas questions my statement that "so far as the collection has a coherent theme, it is that of a marginal commentary on the rise and fall of imperial power". *The Bronze Horseman*, he says, is not really about the rise or fall of Empire; and he stresses the concern of Pushkin in this poem, and of Lermontov in *The Novice*, with the fate of the individual.

Mr Thomas is of course right about this concern. I believe however that in both poems there is another dimension as well: that the fate of the individual has to be seen against a background of ruthless imperial success. In *The Bronze Horseman* it is the domination of the Westernized military state, symbolized by Peter the Great's arbitrary new capital - and in particular by his colossal equestrian statue - which gives the poem its theme. In *The Novice*, the scene is set in the opening lines by the reference to the session of an unnamed Caucasian kingdom (in fact Bagratid Georgia) to Russia, and immediately afterwards by the figure of the Russian general who brings the young captive, a local chieftain's son, to the monastery where he is to be confined. Lermontov, who had taken part as a regimental officer in the conquest of the Caucasus, but who in fact shared Pushkin's liberal ideas, thus makes it clear, to my mind at least, that the pathos of his captive Novice is not only that of a young romantic yearning for inner and outer freedom, but also that of a defeated victim in a war of conquest. In the early years of Nicholas I, when both poems were written, the

Empire of the Tsars was on the upgrade, and the two poems reflect - as well as the individual tragedies of their heroes - different aspects of that ascent. That is what I meant by "the rise ... of imperial power".

Incidentally, in defence of "Neva's majestic pulsation", may I say that great rivers do pulse: I have seen the Neva and the Nile do it, and Wagner heard the Rhine do it, of the pulsing of the double basses in the opening bars of the *Prelude to Rheingold*.

CHARLES JOHNSTON,
32 Kingston House South, London SW7.

Art of the Pharaohs

Sir, - Many of your readers must have regretted the lapse of time perpetrated by your review of the recently refurbished Egyptian sculpture gallery in the British Museum (Commentary, October 2). The effect may be the result of heavy cutting but it suggested not only that Pharaonic art was somehow damaging but also that the art of Egypt in Classical antiquity, under Coptic Christianity and in medieval Islam was totally negligible. Can one take a reviewer seriously who appears to think this? And while it might be amusing, merely as a game, to treat Pharaonic art as if it were Tribal, just as one might suppose that monkeys really typed out Shakespeare, the amusement is mild, and decidedly frivolous, a prejudice rather than a rationally formed opinion.

J. M. ROGERS,
3 Bayley Street, London WC1.

Among this week's contributors

GORDON BROTHMEISTER is Professor of Literature at the University of Essex. His books include *Latin-American Poetry*, 1978.

ANITA BROOKNER's books include *Jacques-Louis David* and the novel *A Start in Life*, both 1981.

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PAUL PRESTON is Reader in Modern History at Queen Mary College, London.

ALAN ROBINSON's *Theodor Fontane: an Introduction to the Man and His Work* was published in 1976.

Versification and Long Lines

Sir, - Is it too late for a personal footnote to J. B. Trapp's interesting article on Tennyson's "To Virgil" (September 18)? I used the long line in a poem called "At T. S. Eliot's Memorial Service", and arranged it in separate couplets, as I feel sure "To Virgil" was so printed in Volume 2 of the Everyman Tennyson. I think my poem must have appeared in some periodical arranged thus, with disagreeable turnings-over of the lines, for when I included it in the selection of my verse in *Penguin Modern Poets 18* I cast it into the four-line stanzas lacking capitals at the start of the indented second and fourth lines, as described by Mr Trapp. But I took this arrangement not from the *Tennyson Research Bulletin*, but from Christopher Rick's great edition, which had appeared in the interim.

In so doing a curious (to my elth ears) phenomenon was revealed: the breaking of Tennyson's line after four feet (leaving five feet remaining) can always be done at a word-ending. In my poem the break had sometimes to come at a mere syllable-ending. (I do not think, by the way, Mr Trapp is quite right in speaking of breaking the line at "the caesura", for it is too long to have one.) I disliked this so much that when I included the piece in my collection *Tiny Tears* I went back to the couplet arrangement - and without any prompting publisher and printer, by choice of type-size and width of setting, avoided too often putting a number of turnings-over. Though the quaternary-setting is surely not right for this expressive metre, Tennyson's original continuous wodge would be a bit over-facting.

DANIEL WASSBEIN,
46 Leckford Road, Oxford OX2 6HY.

The Sapiehas and Poland

Sir, - Peter Hebblethwaite's explanation of why Cardinal Sapieha was known as "Prince Prince", in his review of George Huntington Williams's *The Mind of John Paul II* (October 9), is in need of correction.

ROY FULLER,
37 Langton Way, London SE3 7JJ.

James Thomson and Góngora

Sir, - I wonder what particular passages in English, and also in Spanish, Pat Rogers had in mind when writing (October 2) that "at moments Thomson will even recall Góngora", since their respective styles could not be further apart. Certainly, Rogers's idea of Góngora's aims is very puzzling, since, contrary to what Rogers asserts, Góngora never attempted to "re-value standard semantic currency at a heightened emotional rate"; but rather - and very much unlike what Thomson seems to have done - to create a new currency altogether, for which ends he mined an abundance of coinage of new denominations. A large part of these verbal creations is still in mint condition and looks likely to remain common currency in the Spanish-speaking world for a long time to come. "Refined" yes, "near-grotesque" certainly not. In any case, *pace* Rogers, Góngora knew better than most poets that "el arte exige templanza", whether we understand *templanza* in its common pictorial sense in Spanish of harmony and good dispositions of colours, in the evocation of which Góngora excelled; or as "the practice or habit of restraining oneself in provocation, passion, desire, etc." in which sense *templanza* is the exact equivalent of *temperance*.

I do not know where Rogers has got his Spanish quotations from, but it is sad to see him making use, out of context, of worn-out anti-Góngora clichés of the kind that will convince readers of the TLS that Thomson was not alone in being "admittedly unlikely to have known [Góngora] at all well".

DANIEL WASSBEIN,
46 Leckford Road, Oxford OX2 6HY.

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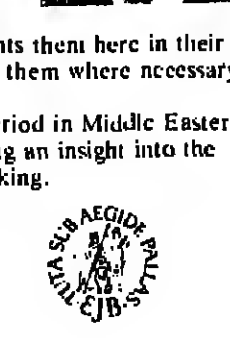
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Edited and translated by Dr. R. Ismail of the Harry S. Truman Institute, Jerusalem

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Terrestrial delvings

By Arthur Terry

MANUEL DURÁN and MARGERY SAFFIR.
Earth's Tones
The Poetry of Pablo Neruda
200pp. Indiana University Press.
£13.50.
0 253 16662 4

At the time of his death in September 1973, Pablo Neruda was preparing eight new volumes of poems to be published simultaneously on his seventieth birthday in the following year. (All these books have since appeared in print, and show no obvious decline in his poetic powers.) This seems chaotic, chaotic both of the time and the poet: the astonishing energy which drove Neruda through the varieties of experience recorded in his autobiographical writings scarcely seems to have felt, even in the face of a long-anticipated death, and the consistency and serenity of his final poems are still firmly centred in the "exploration of being".

Priestly pronouncements

By J. M. Cocking

STEPHANE MALLARMÉ.
Correspondence
Tome V, 1892
Edited by Henri Mondor and Lloyd James Austin
399pp. Paris: Gallimard.

Publication difficulties held up Volume V of the Mallarmé letters for seven years. Lloyd Austin has Volumes VI-X ready for the publisher, though each will have to find room for the material for earlier years that is still being dug up. About half of Volume V is given up to additions and corrections to Volumes I-IV, and the first volume (for which Professor Austin was not responsible) will need to be completely re-written in due course.

The juxtaposition of early and later letters has its peculiar interest. In 1863 Mallarmé wrote to Cazalis that it is indecent to be happy; by 1892 he has very much come to terms with life. He enjoys his modest creature-comforts, his second home and sailing boat at Valvins, and his tremendous prestige as the priest of the new poetry. Any number of letters from follow-writers, painters and journalists show that he is revered as a dedicated artist and lyric as a counsellor and friend. Rodin writes to Mallarmé that in the world of art he is a demigod; "je me hausse dans ma propre estime en pensant que je suis votre ami". Léon Dauterive, reviewing Mallarmé's essay on Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, calls him "le prestigieux remueur d'idées". Camille Maclair approaches him with reverence and begs him for advice. He is much in demand as a promoter or backer of artistic projects and a contributor to special numbers of or struggling literary reviews.

It is true that outside the world of Symbolism and Impressionist enthusiasm references to Mallarmé's reputation are sometimes ironic, sceptical or frankly hostile. Maurice de Flourey wrote in *Le Figaro* in 1891: "Et lo voilà quasi d'actualité, cet étrange poète dont tout le monde à Paris sait le nom, dont personne n'a lu les œuvres, dont on parle souvent sans en savoir grand-chose, si ce n'est vaguement qu'il partage avec Paul Verlaine les honneurs du grand maître dans l'ordre décadent... Puis, il fut bien le dire, que M. Mallarmé les ramène ou non, il a écrit de fort beaux vers, aux premiers temps de sa vie artistique."

Flourey was not alone in feeling more at home with Mallarmé's less obscure poems. But this was one reason why Mallarmé found this article "inept". To Octave Mirbeau he wrote: "Je retravaille, des fois pas mal: si j'ai l'heur, en finissant, de faire oublier les précédents d'avoir de collègues parus sous mon nom, on

he once claimed to be the purpose of all poetry.

Proliferation in itself is hardly an infallible sign of a major poet: Neruda's stature depends also on a quite unusual range of verbal gifts and on a commanding vision which can make itself felt in the smallest details of his poems. At the same time, the kind of continuity which this vision enforces is not always immediately apparent: one of Neruda's constant concerns seems to have been to avoid anything resembling a "Neruda style", and his ability to disconcert his readers by unexpected reverts on the imitator remained with him to the end. To demonstrate the continuity which links together such a vast and endlessly proliferating body of verse requires both tact and patience, as well as a considerable gift for selection and qualities which excite very much in evidence in this admirable new survey. Whatever one's reservations, there is no question that Manuel Durán and Margery Saffir have provided the general reader with a reliable key to the outstanding characteristics of Neruda's poetry – not so much a work of criticism as a guided tour which keeps one on firm ground while judiciously indicating the current state of criticism. Occasionally, indeed, one wishes they had not relied quite so much on the opinions of other critics: their own judgments – as in their account of Neruda's dealings with Surrealism – are sufficiently clear and incisive for them to have risked them more often, and they are not afraid to censure weaknesses which less objective critics have tended to overlook.

The basic strategy of their approach is clear from the chapter headings: "the erotic poet", "the nature poet", "the public poet", "the personal poet", followed by a final chapter on the posthumous poetry. Those divisions are not as schematic as they sound; as the authors themselves admit, there is a good deal of overlap, and their intention is to point to "differences in stress", rather than to "mutual exclusions". Nevertheless, there are certain awkwardnesses which arise from having to discuss the same collection in more than one place: it seems a pity that the reader is first introduced to *Canto general* under the heading of

erotic poetry, and that the account of "Alturas de Macchu Riechi", one of Neruda's central poems, is split between two chapters. Given a reader who is prepared to follow the authors' cross-referencing – there is no index – this is scarcely a major defect. What is more worrying is the way in which the concentration on themes often leads to an excessive amount of paraphrase. Generally speaking, the authors' prose is clear, if a little pedestrian. Their descriptions of individual poems, however, often fall into a "programme note" style in which any sense of immediacy is lost: "The poet explores the body of his beloved, he rejoices in every second of his carnal knowledge". Or, perhaps more memorably: "Kiss after kiss, he travels through Matilde's little intimate, her shores and rivers, her tiny villages, her genital fire, a fire that races through the slender pathways of her blood, that surges from below as a nocturnal carnation between being and nothingness, leaving only a glow in the dark". Translated into Spanish, and delivered *con amor*, this would at least contain some of Neruda's own words, though without either his rhythms or his concentration. At the best of times, it is difficult to write inombarringly about erotic poetry, and especially when, like Neruda's, the imagery continually functions on both a cosmic and a human level.

At the same time, the problem here points to a more general one, namely, the difficulty of presenting a complex and linguistically very sophisticated poet solely on the basis of translations. Professor Durán's English versions, one hastens to say, are normally both accurate and sensitive; nevertheless, it is a severe handicap to have to discuss the poems of *Tenorio* del hombre *luminoso* or *Residencia en la tierra* with only minimal references to the originals. Though, as the authors rightly say, "the lack of punctuation in *Tenorio* effectively and literally destroys the boundaries between one line and the next, one image and the one that follows", the ambiguous syntax of the original can never coincide exactly with that of an English version, however painstaking, and the effect of overlapping images – difficult enough to pin down in Spanish – is inevitably lost.

Language, it goes without saying, is crucial to Neruda's whole enterprise, as it is to that of any major twentieth-century poet. In the two collections just mentioned, one finds figures like Francesca, or Brunetto, or Ulysses, is neither novel nor especially illuminating. The purpose of the book best serves, perhaps, is that of a revision aid for students who haven't time to re-read the poem, though unfortunately it would provide a useful crib to those who somehow never managed the first reading. This is not to say that the ideas and information Fowle presents are totally unobjectionable. He concludes, for example, with a "Note on Reading Danto Today", and is intermittently concerned throughout to relate the *Inferno* to modern life and in modern literature; a practice he considers an "obligation", but the connections he makes – between Dante and Proust, Joyce and Eliot are no more than introductory, while his occasional use of a modern vocabulary – he suggests that "we would now call the poet's condition in the *selva oscura* 'alienation', find that 'monopoly' has replaced usury, compare the language of advertising with that of Dante's flatterers – is too thinly spread to bring Danto convincingly up to date. One can sympathize with the author in his self-confessed uncertainty over how best to enter the Trecento world, but he is not helped by his manner of interpreting Dante's journey through Hell as one of "self-knowledge": a man has to know "the worst about himself" before the best can be reached. This formulation leads Fowle to suggest that to Ulysses

him remaking his own earlier poetic language, partly under the pressure of experience, partly in the light of the verbal discoveries of Surrealism – an influence he was later to repudiate, but which gives his poems of the late 1920s and early 30s the same kind of authority which is evident in the contemporary work of Lorca, Alberti and Alexandre. The move towards a more accessible kind of poetry which took place after this seems at first sight a natural consequence of Neruda's experience of the Spanish Civil War and his subsequent conversion to Communism. Certainly, his conscious assumption of the role of Latin American poet (1950) would scarcely have been conceivable at an earlier date; yet, as Durán and Saffir convincingly argue, there is no clear watershed in his work: though the later poems communicate much more directly than the earlier ones, it is as if the source of complexity had merely shifted from a verbal level to produce the intricate network of imagery which creates the essential structure of *Canto general* and which continues to pervade the later work.

This imagery, already latent in some of Neruda's earliest poems, reflects both the search for a natural order and a sense that the human body itself constitutes the supreme example of such an order. It is this system of correspondences, in which nothing is isolated and everything is referred to a human scale, which underwrites the whole of Neruda's later poetry. In his last, and most personal, poems, the note of elegy is constantly tempered by humour and by the wry acknowledgment that the discontinuous individual must ultimately merge with the cosmic continuity of unindividualized existence. It is no coincidence that one of Neruda's most persistent images is one of delving into earth. As a metaphor both for autobiographical introspection and metaphysical speculation, this hits off exactly the nature of Neruda's poetic endeavour and in turn justifies both the title and the essential slant of the present study. If, as Wallace Stevens once said, "The great poems of heaven and hell have been written, the great poem of earth remains to be written." Neruda has at least shown – often in moving and memorable detail – what such a poem might be like, a fact which the authors of this readable and intelligent book have handsomely recognized.

Language, it goes without saying, is crucial to Neruda's whole enterprise, as it is to that of any major twentieth-century poet. In the two collections just mentioned, one finds figures like Francesca, or Brunetto, or Ulysses, is neither novel nor especially illuminating. The purpose of the book best serves, perhaps, is that of a revision aid for students who haven't time to re-read the poem, though unfortunately it would provide a useful crib to those who somehow never managed the first reading. This is not to say that the ideas and information Fowle presents are totally unobjectionable. He concludes, for example, with a "Note on Reading Danto Today", and is intermittently concerned throughout to relate the *Inferno* to modern life and in modern literature; a practice he considers an "obligation", but the connections he makes – between Dante and Proust, Joyce and Eliot are no more than introductory, while his occasional use of a modern vocabulary – he suggests that "we would now call the poet's condition in the *selva oscura* 'alienation', find that 'monopoly' has replaced usury, compare the language of advertising with that of Dante's flatterers – is too thinly spread to bring Danto convincingly up to date. One can sympathize with the author in his self-confessed uncertainty over how best to enter the Trecento world, but he is not helped by his manner of interpreting Dante's journey through Hell as one of "self-knowledge": a man has to know "the worst about himself" before the best can be reached. This formulation leads Fowle to suggest that to Ulysses

The sights of Hell

By Steve Ellis

WALLACE FOWLE:
A Reading of Dante's "Inferno"
237pp. University of Chicago Press.
£10.80 (paperback, £3.90).
0 226 28887 4

Although Wallace Fowle is his introduction claims that his book is an attempt "to explain the power Dante has exerted over so many readers for so long a time", the commentaries on each canto of the *Inferno* that constitute his study tend to be simply an account of the narrative action of the poem, a *Michelin Guide* to the more important sights on Dante's route and to the order in which they are visited. Thus to untangle the account of a "reading" of the *Inferno* seems misleadingly grandiose. Fowle indeed tells the story of the *Inferno* clearly and sensibly enough, and is good, for example, in discussing the poet's structure of Hell, as in the contrasts he draws between the sins punished within and without the city of Dis; but there is little in his book a student might not have learned already from any competent annotated translation of the *Inferno*, like Dorothy Sayers's, or Singleton's. Fowle can of course allow himself more space than a translator in his analyses of the various episodes, but what he has to say about

Dante "is punishing himself for writing such a poem as the *Inferno*", for "aspiring to know the life of the other world"; while Dante's "corset" to Fate Alberigo in Canto XXXIII is evidence of an "omniscient change" in Dante: "His hate or treachery is turning into treachery... The *Malebranche* fiends were not more guilty of fraud in the ninth circle than Dante is in the ninth". Of course, if Dante is a more confirmed sinner at the bottom of Hell than he was in the *selva oscura* then the entire scheme of the *Commedia* collapses.

Fowle's book makes a number of mistakes. *Sinners* does not, in Canto V, give the *sinners* with his tail, by a "flash" of which he or she is then "hurled" to the appropriate circle in Hell; rather, he girds himself (the number of loops signifying the allotted circle). Nor is the *nuovo lido* of XXII any entertainment Ciampolo promises the demons through his suggested treachery, but rather the contest whereby he escapes them. Nor does the "overwhelmed" Dante hold the rock in XXVI to "avoid collapsing" but to avoid falling off the bridge, in his eagerness to view the *bolgia*. There are more mistakes, and frequent proof-reading errors. In a book otherwise enlivened by some of Blake's illustrations; yet the author's respect for Dante, and a modesty of tone found throughout make the book less irksome to read than it might be.

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The search for origins

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Carlo Morandi is a name hardly likely to ring a bell even among the cognoscenti of Italian culture. A professor of modern history at Florence University, who died in his mid-fifties in 1950, he has never attracted attention as have some of his compatriots and peers. Federico Chabod, Nello Rosselli, Delio Cantimori, all historians of Morandi's generation (and all more or less close to him), are names to evoke a response far beyond the narrow confines of the initiated, albeit for different reasons - Rosselli because of his anti-fascism and his tragic end, murdered by cannonfire; Chabod through his presence on the international historians' circuit and, in the postwar years, his Valdostan and Piedmontese connections in England; Cantimori, not least for his personal influence, over a prolonged period, on a substantial number of exceptionally gifted historians.

Morandi cannot claim any of these attributes, except in the final few years of his life, when he was evidently a stimulating, vigorous, effective, humane but, one suspects, distant *maestro* to a number of talented young Marxist historians who were to make their mark in later years, such as Armando Saitta, Ernesto Ragionieri and Giuliano Procacci (as well as to the present, non-Marxist prime minister of Italy, Giovanni Spadolini).

What then makes Morandi's historical writings worth discussing outside Italy? There are, I think, essentially two reasons - the quality and modernity of his research, and his experience as an intellectual during the fascist and immediate post-fascist years. To separate the two aspects is, of course, artificial, for there can be few better instances - at the level of "high culture" - of the intimate connections between scholarship and a scholar's environment; indeed Morandi would have been the last to deny the Crocean dictum that all history is contemporary history. But the exceptional sense of privacy of this Lombard pharmacist's son deprives us almost wholly of those self-explanatory (and helpful) asides to which intellectuals seem increasingly prone as they age.

Morandi learnt his trade at Pavia from two cotabla and very different historians - Antonio Anzilotti and Ettore Rossi. Anzilotti was a leader of the positivist, so-called "economic-judicial" school, who gave Morandi a lasting sense of the importance of economic and social change and of the "concrete event". Rossi, a nationalist who left him with an idealistic and historicist view of the growth of Italian national consciousness. These two approaches were to characterize Morandi's best work, in which he fused a deep interest in the history of political ideas with constant awareness of their relationship with the social structure and social change. In true idealist fashion, he could assert that the development of political thought reflected the successive phases of the life of a people, only to qualify this immediately with the warning that, for the historian, ideas were primarily significant in their interaction with "concrete reality", and hence at that "dolloca moment" when ideology became part of history. Nowhere was this fusion more apparent than in his first and longest work (too long to be included in the four volumes under review) on Lombardy in the later eighteenth century and revolutionary years (*Idee e forme della politica in Lombardia dal 1748 al 1814*, 1927), a topic and period of study dear to both his teachers, in which he combined a clear analysis of the socio-political effects of economic change with an exaggerated stress on the autochthonous character of the

Lombard reformers, as precursors of an Italian national consciousness.

In those fascist decades when historiography in Italy was dominated by the idealists, marxist and hence class-based social history was ostracized to the faculties of commerce. It is not surprising that Morandi should never again have engaged directly in socio-economic history, nor that his references to the "subterranean forces of change" should have become somewhat generic.

Morandi's writings for long concentrated on two fields and periods, both fashionable areas of research in Italy, and indeed internationally, in the interwar years: the emergence and consolidation of absolutism, and the ideologies of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His studies of Botero, Compagnoni and Correni, which are particularly successful in illuminating, through the analysis of an individual's ideas and actions, the broader problems of a place and an epoch, might seem indicative of separate, if parallel, lines of research. But, in fact, they all bear on the same problem: the emergence of the modern nation-state, a suggestive theme for Italian historians not simply because of the influence of the Italian nationalists' search for origins, but because of the visible results of the treaty of Versailles.

The individuality of nations in political terms - that is, the internal structures of states and their relations with each other - formed the third, and on increasingly important, object of Morandi's research, characteristically combining the nationalist theme of the relevance of the European equilibrium to the origins of the Risorgimento with a broader concern for the role of the balance of power in the history of international relations. To the most liberal of historians, Morandi's interests centred on *Stato e società*. But the earlier approach, which owed more to Melocco than to Ranke, gave way in the 1930s to a more conventional practical and nationalistic attitude. It is here that the influence of fascism on Morandi's scholarship becomes most visible; but also, for so austere and rigorous an intellectual, most perplexing.

The relationship of intellectuals to fascism, and the regime's organization of culture, are difficult and sensitive topics, too easily beggared by moralistic or personalized accusations and counter-accusations. Discussion of them in Italy has long since passed the stage of antifascist fervour which denied any possible connection between fascism and culture, or the crude autobiographical *fascio* (and *mi fascio*) of a Zan Grandi, and has tended to focus in recent years (following Ragionieri's discovery of Togliatti's 1935 Moscow lectures on fascism) on the mechanisms of the regime's manipulation of culture. The central role played by Giovanni Gentile's conception of the *Enciclopedia Italiana* as a national cultural effort "above factions" has become clearer through Gabriele Turi's studies. But alongside, and within, this move to absorb the "a-fascist" intellectual, if not the anti-fascist, role of the study of history - and the role of the historians - is only beginning to emerge.

By definition history occupies a central place in the legitimization of an authoritarian regime. Gioacchino Volpe, a historian of exceptional ability, played the *magna pars* in the case of Italian fascism, not only as its coprosecutor, in which he abandoned his mediaeval studies for more recent centuries, so that he could the more easily describe the regular "rhythm" of the Italian people reaching its organic climax in fascism, but also through his organization of historical studies. A research Institute of modern and contemporary history was founded at Rome, with Chabod and Morandi as leading members; while at Milan an Institute for the study of international politics (ISPI) boasted Volpe's conception of foreign policy as a superior form of historical, incorporating the highest values of the nation.

Through the 1930s, Morandi's writings turned increasingly to problems of foreign policy. He developed his earlier interests in the end of Spanish rule, but turned above all to the international scene since Italian unification. His book of reviews are particularly revealing of this shift of interest: for instance, his comments on the successive volumes of the works of Ruggero Bonghi (a prolific, long-lived and rather second-rate politician of united Italy) move away from Bonghi's attitude towards the state to that towards foreign policy.

In itself, this new development in Morandi's work would hardly be worthy of comment; it might reflect his practical obligations in the Roman Institute to collect and publish diplomatic documents, or more generally, the unquestionable magnetic presence of Volpe. Of far more significance is Morandi's evident identification with fascism through his concentration on foreign policy, rendered explicit in a series of book reviews in *Civiltà Fascista* in 1938-39 and culminating in 1940-41 - of all inopportune moments - in his regular contributions to the fascist journal *Primato*. Morandi even participated in February 1939 in that extraordinary trap prepared for intellectuals by the regime, the congress on "fascist mysticism", in so rational and anti-rhetorical a scholar, this public change of position is perplexing. Barely a nod towards fascism is to be found in the earlier years, even (remarkably) in reviews of a German biography of Mussolini or when Morandi is writing on the treacherous theme of the unitary course of Italian history; indeed, he had rebutted the accusation that a comment on Carlo Alberto's political stupidity reflected on his *imperialism*. By 1938 Morandi had adopted the fascist francophony; in June 1940, he could echo the rhetoric on Italy's Mediterranean "mission".

Even in these years, however, his attitude remained ambivalent. His articles of 1940-42 can often be read at two levels, as a subtle historical defence of the claims of fascist Italy, or as a detached comment on the historical origins of current problems. He continued to review works by anti-fascists, published by Giulio Einaudi. Nor was *Primato* a run-of-the-mill fascist journal: it represented Bottai's last attempt to involve the uncommitted and hostile in intellectual debate, protected from censorship by his ministerial cloak.

The complexity of Morandi's collaboration with fascism in these final years of the regime cannot be adequately discussed in a brief review. At most, one can point to aspects of Morandi which may have predisposed him to listen to the siren call of a Volpe or a Bottai: his deep professional interest in the historical assertion of Italian nationhood, ultimately confirmed in international relations; his Catholicism (at a moment when a Vatican scholar could ignore De Luca, was urging close consciousness of the *trahison des clercs*, which he identified with the detachment of intellectuals from politics; and his belief in the need to communicate with a broader public.

Morandi's brief encounter with fascism appears to have ended by 1943. Like so many of his contemporaries, he can be seen by 1944 as an active anti-fascist. His major, and most committed works in these years are all concerned to instruct an eager and deprived public, from his splendid brief monographs on political parties to the history of Italy, and on the Left in power, to his essay and lectures on the Second World War, or his regular newspaper articles on world affairs. Not unexpectedly, there is a strong element of continuity in his fascist experiences, as for instance in an essay on European unity. As in the earlier years, Morandi's writings in this period offer a valuable insight into the complex and difficult form of intellectual life in the post-war period, a period of pressures and demands of a turbulent political world.

Succouring the submerged

By George Rudé

ALAN FORREST:

The French Revolution and the Poor

198pp. Oxford: Blackwell. £12.50.

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ALBERT SOBOUL:

Comprendre la Révolution

Problèmes politiques de la révolution française (1789-1797).

379pp. Paris: Maspéro.

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Alan Forrest's book is another welcome addition to the recent crop of studies by French, American and British authors on problems of poverty and the means employed by governments to end it or keep it within reasonable bounds. Dr Forrest insists that "the poor" in the context of eighteenth-century and Revolutionary France should not be seen as a single social group but as the total of all those, whether workers, peasants or small employers, for whom economic misfortune or gov-

ernmental policy made survival impossible without some form of public assistance.

Historians have generally believed that, at this time in history, something like one person in ten in every city in Western Europe belonged to this group. The proportion of rural poor was probably higher; but in their case historians have been more reticent. The French Revolutionaries, however, being children of the Enlightenment, considered poverty to be a man-made scourge and took some steps to make a more precise calculation. None more so than the Comité de Mendicité of the Constituent Assembly of 1790, presided over by the indefatigable Duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt. His Committee took a more generous view of what constituted poverty than the common run of the century's administrators and estimated that some two to three million Frenchmen and Frenchwomen, or 10 to 15 per cent of the population, were in need of assistance, whether occasional or permanent. These are the people that (with some reservations in Chapter Eight) are the subject of Forrest's study.

Broadly, his argument is that the men of 1789, and their successors in 1792-94, were genuinely inspired by the belief that it was the "sacred duty" of those in authority, as well as in the national interest, to provide the poor not only with the bare means of subsistence but with the wherewithal to enjoy the common benefits of equal citizenship. And having contrasted this new "social" attitude with the more *laissez-faire* or penny-pinching attitudes of earlier governments (or, for that matter, of the Jacobins' "thermidorian" successors), the author discusses its application to the funding of hospitals, to programmes of outdoor relief for the aged and widows and the care of foundlings. (The final chapter, excellent as it is for other reasons, does not quite fit into this scheme.) But, in nearly every instance, the good intentions of government foundered on the rock of financial stringency. At first, the numerous decrees relating to the alleviation of sickness and destitution met with an unequal response at the hands of local officials; and later, even before the Jacobins had been compelled to limit the operation of the *livre de bienfaisance nationale* to the rural poor alone, the

cost of war-compounded with a runaway inflation placed the needs of those incapable of contributing unaided to the nation's defence very low indeed on the list of priorities.

The exception, of course, was the enrolment of young men (whom circumstance also drew overwhelmingly from the poor) for service in the succession of wars with the crowned heads of Europe that began in the spring of 1792. A year later, there were already over half a million serving in the nation's armies, one half enlisted under the *levée en masse* of February and March 1793. But voluntary enlistment failed and conscription followed six months later. Yet, in spite of official talk of "la nation en armes", the contrary proved to be more true, as lots had to be drawn for selection of conscripts and substitutes were allowed; and this led to endless bribery and dodges that inevitably led in turn to the author's words to the creation of "an army of the poor". It also led, equally inexorably, to the poorer citizens emulating the more prosperous in dodging the draft and - once the idealism of the Republic had worn thin - to large-scale desertion often covered up not only by the deserter's own relations but by the whole community, the mayor and local officials included. Forrest traces this process with great skill and with evident sympathy for the draftees. The chapter is further enlivened by the selection of a large number of case-histories. The same method also distinguishes the previous chapter on the foundlings and sets these two chapters apart from the rest of the book. It also sets them apart from the common run of administrative or institutional history by bringing these men and women to life. Perhaps one should be sorry that Forrest did not find it possible to give each of his chapters a similar treatment; but we must certainly be grateful for what we have got.

Albert Soboul's most recent book - *Comprendre la Révolution* - appears at first sight to be just a score of occasional pieces, written over a period of twenty-five to thirty years and now presented to the reader as a sort of reflection of a mature scholar looking back on his intellectual past. So we have here pieces like that on "Classes and Class Struggle" (published in *La Pensée* in 1954) appearing with the first onslaught on "revisionism" in 1974

and - most recent of all - a piece on the *curds rouges* of the Revolution first published in the *Annales Historiques* as recently as the early summer of this year. Such a repudiation of some of Soboul's most original papers would be welcome in itself; but there is more to it than that, and the clue lies in the title of the volume. Why "*Comprendre la Révolution*"? The simple answer is that one of the author's most persistent critics, François Furet, recently summed up his reflections on the Revolution under the title of "*Penser la Révolution*". And Soboul ripostes quite succinctly on his title-page: "Il ne suffit pas de penser la Révolution. Encore faut-il la comprendre."

To the casual reader this may seem a rather childish exercise in gamesmanship or the mere venting of one scholar's spleen against another. But the conflict goes back to 1965 when Furet and his one-time associate, Denis Richet, published the first volume of their two-volume history of the Revolution which questioned the validity of the principal tenets of the whole school of historians - liberal republicans and Marxists - running for over a century and a half from Thierand Mignet via Michelet, Jaurès and Lefebvre to Soboul. The "orthodox school" (as its critics have called it) has taught, almost as an article of faith, that the Revolution, headed by the bourgeoisie but with strong popular support, destroyed the feudal or seigniorial system and thus paved the way for the capitalist order. In opposing these views the "revisionists" have questioned the survival of feudalism up to 1789, substituted "élites" for bourgeoisie and, for good measure, dismissed the whole Jacobin-popular episode of the Year II as a mere "dérangement", or period of little historical importance when the Revolution ran off its tracks. (In fact, to be strictly truthful, it was the late Alfred Cobban, an Englishman, who started the whole "revisionist" ball rolling in a famous lecture of 1954.) So it is not surprising that Soboul, in his recent volume, should take the occasion to hit back at his critics not only by carefully selecting his title but by reprinting his historiographical essay of 1974, which defonds the central theme of the "classical" tradition against the onslaught of its "revisionist" critics in England, France and America. And so the battle goes on.

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204pp. Munich: Nymphenburger. DM 20.
3 485 00400 6

Hans Werner Richter is best known as the founding father of "Gruppe 47", a loose-knit group of German writers who assembled for three days every year from 1947 onwards to discuss literary matters and to read from their work-in-progress. There was no formal membership - authors and critics attended at the personal invitation of Richter himself. This annual literary gathering (a concept so alien to English intellectual life, with its profound mistrust of any collective literary enterprise) initially supplied many young writers with an invaluable critical forum.

In its early years, the group had the reputation of being radical and "left-wing", but by the mid-1960s it was firmly a part of the literary establishment, and the work of writers affiliated to the group was denounced as "silly" and "banal" by a representative of the new generation of young writers, the Austrian Peter Handke. At a memorable session of "Gruppe 47" in April 1966, Handke, then an unknown 23-year-old whose first novel had just been published, stood up in the midst of a large body of accepted writers and critics and accused them of merely producing and promoting an impotent "Beschreibungsliteratur" (descriptive literature). Suddenly, Richter and his "radical" associates had become the old guard of modern German literature.

Richter is now in his seventies and ranks well and truly in the old guard. Apart from his role as mentor of "Gruppe 47", his own creative output has been less than remarkable. His latest novel, with its cumbersome title ("The Flour of False Triumphs"), tackles a theme which has already been impressively and comprehensively treated in distinguished novels by the most illustrious

of his younger associates (notably Andersen, Böll, Grass and Lenz): the impact of the catastrophic rise and fall of National Socialism on the lives of "ordinary" German citizens.

This self-styled novel actually comprises two weakly synchronized stories, which follow the fortunes of two such citizens up to the end of the Second World War. One is a barber and the other a teacher, and the rather tenuous link between them (apart from their both being called Willi) is that they happen to be brothers-in-law. The first story relates the compromises enforced on the barber by the new order, while the second charts the teacher's struggle to preserve his intellectual integrity in a Nazi state he felt politically contemptible. There is little contact between the two Willis, but when the local Nazi branch-leader (the villain of both stories) invites the barber to join the Party or else have his shop closed down, he seeks his brother-in-law's advice. The latter advocates prudence, collaboration and survival. Finally appointed mayor after the war, he saves the

barber from deportation and the wrath of the Russians.

Richter introduces several heavily-handed parallels between the experiences of the two Willis under the Nazis. Both are compelled to make a public demonstration of their loyalty to the Führer. The barber reluctantly wins first prize in a shooting competition; a large oil-painting of Hitler. The branch-leader instructs him to hang it above his bed, much to his dismay and that of his wife. He privately mocks the portrait when he gets up every morning, but that is the extent of his resistance to the new order. Their bedroom implausibly becomes a place of pilgrimage for loyal Nazis from miles around - a contrived symbol for the way National Socialism invaded the most intimate areas of private life. At the end of the war, the barber's wife chops up the portrait in a frenzy of revenge, thereby clearing the plundering Russians of a trophy to take back to Moscow.

The teacher, an ardent pacifist, is more overtly hostile to the Nazi regime and is forced to undergo a series

of calculated humiliations. All his "subversive" books are burned, and he loses his teaching post. Finally the branch-leader orders him to plant an oak at a ceremony to commemorate Hitler's birthday. He meekly complies, swallowing his pride and principles. But when he is unexpectedly re-employed as a teacher, he tells his pupils in an unguarded moment that Hitler is an idiot. Immediately arrested and seemingly destined for a concentration camp, he is mysteriously released again, but only learns why after the war. The Russians make him mayor, and one night he is visited by the fugitive branch-leader. Willi passes up the opportunity of revenge and supplies him with false papers. His wife subsequently reveals that she grovelled to the branch-leader in order to secure Willi's release. Her act of voluntary degradation leaves him stunned; personal integrity proves the ultimate illusion in this catalogue of "false triumphs".

The blurb suggests the book will prove particularly instructive for young people, yet it is difficult to see what possible pleasure for historical insight young readers could derive from such a flat and dreary double narrative. It certainly reveals little about the phenomenon of National Socialism or the real capabilities of the modern German novel. But it may just reveal why Hans Werner Richter continues to remain best known as the founding father of "Gruppe 47".

Just as the title is too monumental for the slowness of the stories, the deliberately, almost chillingly simple

Prospering mutely

By Michael Hofmann

LUDWIG FELS:

Ein Umding der Liebe
338pp. Darmstadt: Luchterhand. DM 32.
3 472 86523 7

Many recent German novels and films have been almost allegorical in their use of individual destinies to represent the totality of development in that country over the last thirty years. Böll's *Ansichten eines Clowns*, Grass's *Die Blechtrommel*, Helga Brahm-Sanders's *Deutschland, helge Mutter*. In all these history is felt on the pulse of an eccentric - a clown, a dwarf, a deformed mother and her child. To this gallery of unhappy freaks, Ludwig Fels has contrived Georg Bleistein, the fat man, who is himself *Ein Umding der Liebe*, "a colossus of love".

In all these works there is an emphasis - surprising and paradoxical to the casual observer - on the

continuity that underlie the German "miracle" and in fact made it possible; an unbending materialism, the sacrifice of individual to collective goals, the obsessive pursuit of monolithic ends - first world domination, now profit and efficiency. It is the old and the rich who have all the tenacity; Bleistein realizes that they are the survivors, whereas the likes of him are simply crushed by suffering. The newer generation is shown failing to assert itself and its values; unable to escape from the repressions of family and society, the insistence on a mute prosperity. As Fels sees it, there is something sinister in the imposition of this silence: "Heimat, dort, wo die Rube für die Ordnung sorgt und die Ordnung für die Ruhe", he writes in one of the short, choral lyrics that are interspersed in the novel - a form familiar to readers of Grass's *Der Butt*.

In Georg Bleistein, Fels has found a representative figure who is less coloured by the fantastic than those mentioned earlier - what could be more real and more German than

overweight? - and closer to everyday life. He is twenty-seven, lives in a small town in Bavaria with his aunt and grandmother, and works in a supermarket restaurant. His father abandoned his mother before he was born, and she later lost custody of him to the relations who brought him up - without affection, but instead with endless quantities of food, and later drink as well. Where his work is brutal and exhausting, his home life is impoverished and variously hypocritical. His grandmother drinks to get her through her day, his aunt is religious, he masturbates to scenarios from pornography. This horrific existence, described without pathos or distance, takes up the first half of the book. In the second, he leaves home and goes to the city to search for his mother. He manages to find her, alcoholic and ill, virtually enslaved to the owner of a fast-food restaurant (the typical of this book), working as a cleaner, laundress and whore. Neither can he find the salvation of the other: both are disappointed, and the book ends with Bleistein's abortive attempt to kill his mother's "lover" - although the word makes a mockery of his functions.

Ludwig Fels has written an extraordinarily good book about a society that coarsens its members until they are incapable of dreaming. Georg Bleistein's conception of his mother as a rich super-whore emerges naturally from his high-technology drudgery in the restaurant; she in turn had been hoping for an equally rich, suave pimp. Another perspective on this society is given in the poems and, at the beginning of chapters, in meteorological and human weather descriptions that are informed by an Expressionistic loathing. The rest of *Ein Umding der Liebe* is written in plain and fiercely accurate style, rounded off by occasional memories and epiphanies of Georg - as when he imagines Jesus coming to supper, hanging his crown of thorns on the coat-rack; or, as a relief of this book, working as a cleaner, laundress and whore. Neither can he find the salvation of the other: both are disappointed, and the book ends with Bleistein's abortive

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J.J. MAYOUX:

Sous de vastes portiques
Etudes de littérature et d'art anglais
340pp. Paris: Maurice Nadeau/Letres Nouvelles.

Jean-Jacques Mayoux is commonly regarded in his own country as the most eminent of *anglicistes*, who until quite recently occupied the principal chair of English studies at the Sorbonne. The collection of essays under review is in fact the sequel to a previous work, published twenty-one years ago and similarly devoted to English subjects, entitled *Vivants Fiers*. Among his other works, are ones devoted to Shakespeare, Joyce, English painting and Beckett. Indeed, the fourth and final part of *Sous de vastes portiques* consists of about sixty pages devoted to essays dealing with three different but inter-linked aspects of Beckett's work, from which one may conclude that their author has a greater predilection for the latter than for that of any other living writer.

From the brief *avant-propos* onwards, it becomes increasingly clear that for this connoisseur of the English imagination what is most fruitfully revealing in any work to which he devotes his attention is the symbol or image. Mayoux is always more immediately interested in the latent than in the overt content of whatever subject he wants us to focus new attention on; and the connections he is so adept at tracing between his themes and their associated symbols are best described as being of an underground nature. These links and interrelationships give his book a coherence one would not expect to find in such a collection of reprinted pieces.

Mayoux opens his survey with Laurence Sterne, to whose perennially seminal genius he dedicates a pair of studies, then passes on to an examination of William Blake, *illuminé*. To conclude the first part, after writing about William Beckett and Virginia Woolf, The first is examined in an essay divided into three close-packed, pertinent sections, evidently the result of long and intimate familiarity with his entire output and biography. The full title of the other study is "Virginia Woolf au pouvoir des images", where the key-word is "image".

The last study in this part of Mayoux's book is on "John Cowper Powys: l'extase et la sensualité". Though translations of Powys's works are now beginning to appear frequently in France, and to be received with an apparently growing

In isolation

By Peter Kemp

CLARE HANSON and ANDREW GURR:
Katherine Mansfield
146pp. Macmillan. £10. (paperback, £4.95).
0 333 27056 8

Early in their book, Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr pounce on the chameleon aspect of Katherine Mansfield's genius: then, disappointingly, they let it slip through their fingers. Stressing the importance of disguise and acting in her life, they don't pursue this impulse through her stories as revealingly as they could. Likewise, while pointing out that much of her best work was produced when she was very isolated, they fail to show fully how this best work circles around themes of isolation.

Isolation and loneliness, significant factors in Katherine Mansfield's life, hallmark her art. Vividly empathizing, she seemed to feel a need to keep her distance from other people lest they coloured her personality too permanently. Solitude, as her letters and journal show, had its useful pleasures ("the amount of mi-

nutely alert Alice will find much to divert and possibly instruct them in this suitably enchanting essay. After Carroll/Dodgson has been revealed as a ventriloquist masochist, and a crypto-subversive satirist with affinities with Borges and Swift to boot, our attention is drawn to D. G. Rossetti and the pre-Raphaelite imagination in general: the sonnet-sequence "The House of Life" seems to me to be given an altogether juster appraisal in these pages than has most frequently been accorded it by modern English critics. But, Mayoux shrewdly observes, poetry is not *mimesis*. He adds that the man who, when in Paris in 1864, could recognize a good painter in Millet, was nevertheless unable to see in the work of Manet anything more than "mere scrawls"; and finally concludes that Rossetti's seemingly endless, varying effective paintings of languidly yearning or dolorous, curvilinear and sensual women were in fact the poet-painter's portraits of his own soul, or as one should no doubt say nowadays *anima*. This is followed by just over ten pages, concluding the book's second part, devoted to Aubrey Beardsley, "satantique et pervers".

The third part opens with an unusually penetrating analysis of Conrad which, whether influenced or not by psychiatric insights, shows us by psychological means how he determined to fit into the conventional way of life of his adopted land, the radical conservative endowed with a prophetic lucidity so upsetting that he had to do his best to conceal it behind a tersely matter-of-fact style. Mayoux comes to the conclusion that, notwithstanding *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*, it is really to *Heart of Darkness* that we should turn if looking for Conrad's most serious attempt to grapple with the fundamental problems of our present civilization.

Next come essays on two outstanding representatives of a by now legendary generation: James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. The first is examined in an essay divided into three close-packed, pertinent sections, evidently the result of long and intimate familiarity with his entire output and biography. The full title of the other study is "Virginia Woolf au pouvoir des images", where the key-word is "image".

The last study in this part of Mayoux's book is on "John Cowper Powys: l'extase et la sensualité". Though translations of Powys's works are now beginning to appear frequently in France, and to be received with an apparently growing

The pains of expulsion

By David Gascoyne

appreciation, his reputation in his native land, until at least, quite recently, except among a handful of faithful devotees, tended to be that of a scarcely readable victim of an assortment of manias, afflicted with chronic logorrhea into the bargain. As far as I am concerned, it was not really until I read his *Autobiography* to which Mayoux unfortunately makes no reference, that I began to realize that here was not only an extraordinary man, but probably a writer likely to be remembered with increasing recognition of his stature for a long while to come. Mayoux's tribute to him is restricted for the most part to a summary, accompanied by many shrewd asides, of *Wolf Solent*, in the course of which he points out that there is an unmistakably manic element in this first notable contribution by Powys to modern fiction.

Slight enough though the resemblance between Wolf Solent or any other of Powys's personae and a typical Beckett character may seem, it strikes me that when Mayoux, referring to Beckett's first novel *Murphy*, states that its already typically antithetical central character "peut être pris... comme un automotisme riche et significatif. Notre solipsiste vaseux, comme le dieu de Spinoza, s'aime lui-même d'un amour intellectuel", he is in fact resorting to one of the types of *correspondance* which give his collection of studies the basic coherence to which I have alluded. The term "solipsiste vaseux" seems as applicable to Powys's surely to some extent autobiographical *Wolf Solent* as to Beckett's absurdly spineless *Murphy*. If not more so, given Powys's hero's propensity to mystical introspection and what one might designate as his ichthyosaurus-like wallowings in sensation and in intimations of the primeval. If Mayoux is right in such a way, one finds no difficulty in making the transition from the Powys piece which ends the penultimate section to the last, entirely devoted to Beckett, without any sense of abruptly altered focus.

At the risk of oversimplifying the content of his book, I would say that nearly all the writers or artists selected by Mayoux for consideration in it can best be understood as not merely subjects of a banal mother-fixation, subjectivities banished into a condition of being forever haunted by an unassuageable longing for that state outside mundanely contingent time we once knew in the womb. Take Sterne, for instance. Although at the opening of Chapter Five of the First Volume of *Tristram Shandy* we are given the precise date in 1718 on which Tris-

trant Shandy, Gentleman, was launched into "this scurvy and disastrous world of ours", nearly half the book has already gone by when he remarks: "I am this month one whole year older than I was this time twelve months; and having got, as you perceive, almost into the middle of my fourth volume, and no farther than to my first day's life, 'tis demonstrative that I have three hundred and sixty-four days more life to write just now than when I first set out; so that instead of advancing, as a common writer, in my work, with what I have been doing at it, on the contrary, I am just thrown so many volumes back." Although Mayoux's principal concern in citing this passage is to relate it to the ostensible subject of his first Sterne study, "Temps vécu et temps créé dans 'Tristram Shandy'", it is surely significant that a couple of pages after the passage just quoted, we find Sterne/Shandy wishing he could write in chapter on sleep, and during the course of one of his innumerable, apparently irrelevant digressions exclaiming: "what a happiness it is to man, when the anxieties and passions of the day are over, and he lies down upon his back, that his soul shall be so seated within him that, whichever way she turns her eyes, the heavens shall look calm and sweet above her; - no desire, or fear, or doubt that troubles the air, nor any difficulty past, present, or to come, that the imagination may not pass over without offence in that sweet succession..." Here, surely, is unmistakable confirmation of the thesis that Mayoux elsewhere implies - without baldly stating it, which is that Sterne presents an example of the writer to whom unadulterated everyday reality is so unbearable that he has to keep constantly seeking to evade it by flights of fancy or verbal extemporizations.

Similarly with Beckett, in connection with whom Mayoux observes: "La musique le ravit en fréquences extases, hors du temps, de l'espace et de lui-même. ... L'eau n'est pas non plus sans pouvoir magique sur lui... Une baignade au lido lui donne cette extase d'anéantissement, ce vertige de retour, que connaissent bien les lecteurs de Melville." Such characteristics - added to the fact that in his best-known mini-masterpiece, *Vathek*, the terrible hall of Eblis, which has the colour and surface of ebony, and trapped by the walls of which Vathek and Nouronhar confront their ultimate fate, the underground and therefore unavoidably evokes, like the closed-in valley scene earlier in the tale, the womb - seem to make of Beckett one more

example of disdainful repudiation of our meagre form of everyday existence, combined with a continual, if unconscious, longing for *la vie antérieure*. The author explains that one of his chief reasons for including Beckett in what he calls "le monde des grands imaginatifs et visionnaires" is that in this world temporarily incarnate forms are always ready for immediate metamorphosis. He refers more than once to Beckett's affinity with Nerval; and his unswerving tendency towards the fantastic, which does more to affiliate him with English precursors of Surrealism than seems to have been hitherto pointed out, is repeatedly stressed.

As I have indicated, of all living writers, Beckett appears to have secured J.J. Mayoux's most sympathetic admiration. The three-part exegesis with which the whole collection ends is a model of its kind and can have few rivals among English works of Beckett criticism. Among the considerations raised in it, three stand out. First, an affinity with Kafka having been noted, there is a reminder that both Kafka and Beckett wrote in languages not native to them: the Czechoslovak Jew using German to express himself, just as the ex-Dubliner now confines himself almost exclusively to French. This prompts Mayoux to observe that both writers share a similar sense of the exteriority of the languages employed by them. Having designated this parallel, Mayoux goes on to say: "L'infinité Beckett-Proust est subtile et, je crois, profonde; et à point out that 'A travers la cosmologie proustienne Beckett se cherche et se trouve.' He refers to Beckett's short monograph on Proust first published in 1931, and makes the very astute remark: "On reconnaît dans le Proust de Beckett l'amorce des schémas symboliques qui ont été pris à la lettre par quelques critiques naïfs dans l'oeuvre beckettienne." The language used by Beckett to describe Proust's prolonged self-exploratory submersions anticipates, according to Mayoux, not only *Murphy* but even the late *L'Innommable*. Finally, in confirmation of my hunch with regard to the control, underlying theme that binds all his studies together, Mayoux writes, after making a brief comparison with Joyce: "Si l'on considère que dans les oeuvres de la maturité de Beckett le symbole de l'expulsion concerne la naissance, et que l'expulsion est suivie d'une longue errance en quête du refuge, on voit qu'il n'a pu y avoir monde que dans cette sorte de prolongement de la vie utérine que l'on reconnaît dans l'enfance et à peine un peu plus tard."

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Hunting for a home

By S. S. Praver

JOHN SANDFORD:

Landscape and Landscape Imagery in R. M. Rilke
159pp. Institute of Germanic Studies, University of London. £8.
0 85457 096 9

The New German Cinema
175pp. Oswald Wolff. £10.95 (paperback, Eyre Methuen, £4.95).
0 85496 404 5

These two books by John Sanford are solidly and imaginatively researched, clearly and attractively written, and lucidly constructed.

Landscape and Landscape Imagery in R. M. Rilke has grown out of an unusually elegant and accomplished doctoral thesis. Economically, and with a sure sense of relevance, it surveys the poet's letters as well as his poems and stories, to show how Rilke's search for a home, for a meaningful and stimulating environment, expressed itself in his writings; and how successive stages of his landscape experience symbolically enact modern man's attempts to chart his own place in the universe. As we watch Rilke move from place to place across Europe we learn to see the landscapes and townscapes he encountered as inducements to changing types of artistic production dominated by varying (and developing) symbols and themes. Three great landscapes stand out in Dr

Sandford's comprehensive account: the open vastness of the Russian plains; the confusion and constriction of Paris, the great city in which Rilke re-experienced the work of Baudelaire; and the gentle cultivated, "ruralized" hillsides of the Valais. Russia provided the setting for God-searching neo-Romantic poetry; the "chaos" of Paris challenged the poet to assert his ordering self; in Mozart Rilke learnt to express, with new force, that ideal balance between whole and part, Non-Self and Self, which he called "Bezug". In charting this course of development, Dr Sanford never neglects absence and negativities, drawing our attention to terrifying harshnesses of the Swiss landscape which play only a minor part in Rilke's writings, and to the poet's appreciation of the delicate effect that may accompany the "taming" and "ordering" he valued. The reader thus obtains a much more comprehensive account of Rilke's life and work than the title and the modest length of this book would lead him to expect.

Dr Sanford deals with the development of the New German Cinema with the same knowledge, authority and economy which he shows in the book on Rilke's landscapes. He begins his story with the last of the Nazi epic, Veit Harlan's *Kolberg* (1945), and leads us by degrees, in his first chapter, to the Oberhausen Manifesto of 1962 which provided the prelude to a West German *Autorenkino* or *cinéma des auteurs*, whose products are now

admired by discerning audiences all over the world. The work of seven of these auteurs is discussed film by film, with a wealth of detailed information held together by a secure sense of relevance and a trained aesthetic sense that does not shrink from value-judgments. What is most prominent, however, is Dr Sanford's ability to disengage his film-makers' artistic aims and purposes. He shows us, subtly and clearly, what Kluge and Herzog, Straub and Schlöndorff, Fassbinder, Wenders and Syberberg wanted to achieve and how far they attained their goals. There is also a brief section on a number of genres cultivated by other directors: notably the new "Heimfilm" and various kinds of socially committed cinema; and a closing chapter has pertinent notes on financial problems and policies, the co-operation of film and television, as well as public patronage and mutual support schemes. The book is completed by a glossary of German terms, a filmography, and a brief annotated bibliography. It is true that in the more summary chapter many of us will miss a discussion of our own favourites; but where a national cinema offers such a wealth of interesting material, selection was inevitable. The films which are discussed all merit serious consideration; Dr Sanford places them firmly and sensibly in the context of German culture, especially literary culture, and illustrates them with many well-chosen and clearly reproduced stills.

Although, specifically, and rightly, renounces the vain ambition to produce a "complete" bibliography which would include everything that might be considered in any way relevant to Schopenhauer's work, life and influence - the result would be useless and still we would not have finished" - his bibliography nonetheless contains about 2,400 entries.

Among the facts which emerge is that a Japanese edition of the works in fifteen volumes is the only complete translation of Schopenhauer into a foreign language, and that Schopenhauer appears in a novel of 1933 about Nelson and Lady Hamilton.

Here, then, we have two books on

very different subjects but with the same scholarly and imaginative virtues. Both are sure of a welcome from students and teachers of German.

Ranking from Schopenhauer's first publication in 1813 to learned dissertations on the philosophy of 1980, and encompassing the various complete and selected editions of his works, letters and conversations, translations into foreign languages, biographies, studies of every imaginable kind, and even novels in which Schopenhauer figures, Arthur Hübscher's *Schopenhauer-Bibliographie* (331pp. Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 3 7728 0792 5) is presumably the most comprehensive that has yet appeared.

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The torments of composition

By Robert Gibson

ALISON FAIRLIE:
Imagination and Language
Collected essays on Constant,
Baudelaire, Nerval and Flaubert
479pp. Cambridge University Press.
£30.
0 521 23291 0

PIERRE GASCAR:
Gérard de Nerval et son temps
329pp. Paris: Gallimard.

Beyond the confines of Cambridge where, for the past three decades, Alison Fairlie has been highly esteemed as a gifted teacher and an inspiring director of research, she has, hitherto, been best known to lovers of French literature for her magisterial study of Leconte de Lisle's *Poèmes barbares* (1947) and, even more, for her classic monographs on *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1960) and on *Madame Bovary* (1962). Throughout this period, she has, in addition, mainly for the benefit of her fellow scholars, continued to produce an array of essays and addresses, remarkable both for their range and their quality. Now, on the occasion of her retirement, two of her erstwhile colleagues have com-

bined to present a generous selection of the best of these essays for a wider public. Malcolm Bowie has painstakingly assembled and edited them. Lloyd Austin has provided a detailed bibliography of her writings, and the whole enterprise constitutes an eloquent tribute not only to an outstanding scholar but a memorial to what, in the history of French studies at Cambridge – with as many as five Professors occupying Chairs concurrently – must be seen as a golden age.

Given the diversity of functions the various pieces had to serve – review-articles, papers to conferences, contributions to volumes of homage for other professors emeriti – they form a remarkably coherent whole. What helps to unite them is partly the distinctive quality of Professor Fairlie's prose-style which, whether she writes in French or English, is consistently clear, precise, penetrating and persuasive, and partly the personalities and preoccupations of the four authors on whom she concentrates. Each of them scrutinized his own richly complex personality with the same brutal honesty and often the same sardonic irony with which he viewed human affairs in general, and as Professor Fairlie's essays stress again and again, each was fascinated and tormented by the potentialities and the

limitations of language. Whether it be Constant ("Les sentiments de l'homme sont confus et mêlés et presque jamais personne n'est tout à fait sincère ni tout à fait de mauvaise foi") or Baudelaire ("Le poète que j'ai fait est le résultat d'un travail très douloureux") or Nerval ("J'essayais de parler de choses que j'avais dans le cœur, mais je ne sais pourquoi, je ne trouvais que des expressions vulgaires, ou bien quelque phrase pompeuse de roman") or Flaubert ("Il est difficile d'exprimer exactement quoi ce soit"), they were all agonizingly engaged in "the intolerable wrestle with words and meanings".

One of the great merits of Professor Fairlie's critical approach is her keen interest in and admirable ability to describe the tortuous processes by which works of genius are fashioned. She analyzes both the external and the internal pressures which shaped that miracle of compression and control that is Constant's *Adolphe*. She reveals the rich hoard of poetic ore that Nerval quarried from Richelieu's *Dictionnaire des Rimes*. In minutely detailed studies of Baudelaire's variants, she observes him laboriously confining his incantations through the substitution and repositionings of words or the subtlety of changes to punctuation. She recounts the complicated genesis of Flaubert's *Un*

cœur simple, revealing both how much and how little it owes to Louise Collet's excessively sentimental poem *La Paysanne*, on which he lavished letters after letter of meticulous technical analysis.

Compulsively readable though she unfailingly is on the artist in action, Professor Fairlie is even more impressive in her analyses of their finished work. The eight essays on *Adolphe* which deal with structure, with "framework as suggestive art", with the stylization of experience and which argue – persuasively in my view – that, contrary to common belief, *Adolphe* is by no means the only properly realized character in the novel, collectively constitute some of the most perceptive studies anywhere available on Constant and his work; as Professor Bowie rightly observes in his foreword, they ought to have been issued as a separate book long ago. Her essay on Nerval's *Sylvie* and *Les Châlières* is, in my experience, just about the most helpful introduction to these perennially tantalizing works that has yet been written for the general reader; short though it is, it comes directly to grips with the quintessential data about his life and work much more effectively than Pierre Gascar's highly praised *Gérard de Nerval et son temps*, which is colourfully informative about the political machinations

and cultural cults of the poet's times but distinctly reticent about the making and the meaning of his poems and stories.

Where Baudelaire and Flaubert are concerned, doubtless because *Les Fleurs du Mal* and *Madame Bovary* are covered so effectively by Professor Fairlie elsewhere, the essays in this collection concentrate on their other works. There are essays on Baudelaire's *Petits poèmes en prose*, on his art-criticism and his correspondence which are perceptive and provocative enough to send one back to the texts in question with rekindled curiosity. The same is true of her analysis of Flaubert's response to certain of the painters of his day and, even more, of the two penetrating studies of *L'Education sentimentale* in which she lays bare some of Flaubert's most deep-seated doubts concerning the artist's role and demonstrates his technique for provoking a particular form of self-critical empathy whereby the reader's ultimate judgment is not so much of Flaubert as of his own perceptiveness.

Self-critical empathy and consistently sharp perceptiveness, indeed, are the distinctive attributes of this distinguished volume, which will go on being consulted with pleasure and profit for years to come.

Observing the formalities

By John Hope Mason

C. J. GOSSIP:
An Introduction to French Classical Tragedy
193pp. Macmillan. £15.
0 333 26168 2

Few forms of European drama are more remote from the English theatre tradition, and our general expectations of drama, than seventeenth-century French tragedy. The highly stylized conflicts, set in a severely formal framework and conducted in refined language, seem devoid of theatrical life; interesting to read, perhaps, but tedious to watch and rarely staged. Yet the plays of Corneille and Racine were popular and much admired by the Paris audiences of their time. What was the attraction and excitement they provided? Why did they take the form they did? What has given Racine's plays their continuing place in the French repertoire?

C. J. Gossip's book sets out to answer these and related questions. It aims to give the "complete or relative new-comer" an introduction to all aspects of the plays of Corneille and Racine. There are chapters dealing with details of staging, publication, the sources of the plays, their form, the unities, the language, *raisonnement*, *bien-séance*, critical reception, and the "tragic element". The approach is comprehensive and Gossip clearly has a thorough knowledge of the plays in question.

Unfortunately, however, his study lacks the perspective and focus which an introduction of this kind most needs. The historical and social background is given little attention, and the literary context of the plays even less. Brief remarks such as that "the study of the passions" in Racine, La Rochefoucauld and Mme de La Fayette "is the other side of the coin from that on the splendours of the Sun King are conventionally engraved", do not take us very far. The intellectual context is not dealt with at all; Jansenism is mentioned but never explained, the names of Descartes, Pascal, Mersenne or Gassendi do not occur. As a result no clear picture emerges of the world in which the plays appeared.

Nor is there a clear account of the plays themselves. There are many details but there is no general assessment of the achievement of Corneille and Racine. The claim that they wrote "some of the most important tragedies of Western literature" is never justified. Corneille's

and Gossip is aware of this difficulty. However, his estimate of its importance varies at different points in the book and, informative though these chapters are, they are not presented in a way that aids understanding of the plays.

The discussion of the unities and the "tragic element" suffers from similar defects: the treatment is descriptive rather than analytical. The concern for *raisonnement* and the adoption of the unities of time, place and action were major – many would say decisive – factors in giving French tragedy its distinctive character. Since much was written about these subjects at the time we are well informed about them and Gossip covers much of this ground. In such a book, however, what is needed is not simply an account of how the unities came to prevail but some explanation of why they should have done so. What were the terms

of the argument? What gave Aristotle and Horace their authority? What was the "natural reason" that Corneille invoked as justification for the unity of time? Why did this issue assume such importance? These questions go unanswered.

The problem of the intentions and aspirations which lay behind the plays is dealt with in a conventional manner, that is to say, in terms of Aristotelian tragedy. The author indicates ways in which Corneille stood apart from this tradition but does not explore at length the much greater disparities in Racine. This is the most serious omission in the book, for much of the fascination of Racine's plays arises from the way they transcend the terms in which Aristotle's criteria were then perceived. It is because Racine realized that "violence des passions" and achieved that "tristesse majestueuse" which he spoke about in his preface

to *Bérénice* that his plays remain alive today. Gossip maintains that "a moral code is at least implicit in Racine's plays", and that the preface to *Phèdre* shows this. But what is most striking about Racine's published writings about his own plays is the absence of any moral concern in the prefaces to all the plays before *Phèdre*; he is interested only in verisimilitude and emotional effect.

The inability to make this distinction arises more from the conventional nature of the discussion than from a lack of historical sense, but a greater attention to the development of each writer, his existence as an individual rather than as someone producing examples of a genre, would have helped the reader greatly. As it is, this book shows too little regard for the reader it is aimed at. It may inform; it does not illuminate. It is also poorly written.

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Eminently enlightened

By Robert Wokler

HAYDN MASON:
Voltaire
A Biography
194pp. Granada. £9.95.
0 236 40184 X

It was "pour encourager les autres", observed Voltaire in one of his now proverbial sarcasms, that a delinquent Admiral Byng had been condemned to death. This epitaph might equally have paid tribute to Voltaire's own life. No one in the eighteenth century campaigned on behalf of the public interest with greater vigour or wit, and no one commanded the stage of the Enlightenment with more skill. The most engaged publicist, poet of pre-revolutionary France, the *roi soleil* of philosophers, he set the example for all reformers of the Ancien Régime, indefatigably rousing his troops on behalf of the good cause time and again when Jeaus, courtiers, censors, or the police left other partisans exhausted and crushed.

The compelling story of his exploits and career is attractively retold in this illustrated biography. Haydn Mason's sure grasp of primary sources is displayed here with a light touch which lends vitality to the

man's character and plots some channels through an effusion of works which less sympathetic readers have occasionally judged "a chaos of clear ideas". Though Professor Mason reminds us that Voltaire's vast correspondence – generally intended for circulation and print – is not on every matter the most reliable guide to his real thoughts, it is this testimony above all (in its definitive edition by Theodore Besterman) which is invoked to fill out a fine portrait of his public personality – as advocate of English toleration and disseminator of Newtonian physics, as assailant of Christianity and critic of atheism, as champion for the rehabilitation of Calas, and promoter of freedom in Geneva. "Oh, how I love this philosophy of action and goodwill!", Voltaire once confided to a friend, well within earshot of the gallery.

Mason also turns to the correspondence to throw light on its author's ambivalent relations with men whose genius he thought flawed, and we find here perceptive sketches of his attitude towards Frederick the Great, with whom Voltaire sometimes behaved like an ageing coequal, harem, and Rousseau, with whom he behaved like an expectant crusading knight, continually stabbed in the back by a pilgrim gone astray. As Mason so aptly shows, this master of Enlightenment ceremonies could make a splendid spectacle of himself

even in his letters, but he was also captive to his audience, at once disdainfully cavalier and driven to frenzy by detractors.

The most original element of this book is its well-documented parallels between incidents in Voltaire's life and themes in his *comtes*, *Candide* and *L'Ingénu*, and we are also offered some engaging descriptions of his character by contemporaries who fell under his spell. But the most remarkable feature of Mason's story is its shrewd depiction of the intimate, often tormented, private face of an overwhelmingly ebullient public man. Voltaire's life in the wings and shadows of the eighteenth century is as much illuminated here by his central roles. We are made to confront an individual who, having abandoned the Cross, still found solace in the cell, and who at his desk at Cirey, thrived under a regime of work almost worthy of the most austere monk. We also find a brooding spirit, prompted as much by melancholy as by buoyant enthusiasm, an anxious bourgeois gentleman not quite certain of his place in aristocratic company, whose ascendancy over the *salon* of the *lumières* was scarcely crowned by a belated and begrudged election to the Académie Française. Equally sensitive are Mason's remarks on Voltaire's attachment to woman – above all to Mme du Châtelet, a companion-scribe and protectress, whose premature death in 1749

caused him the most intense suffering, and to Mme Denis, his indulgent niece, with whom he was infatuated for the last thirty-four years of his life.

Yet if Voltaire's darker qualities are here made vivid, the deeper aspects of his thought may still elude some readers. What are the central themes of his histories, or the merits of his poetry? Just how was his belief in the advance of culture tempered by his pessimistic view of man's ingenuity to enlightened monarchy square with his endorsement of the publican? What, indeed, is the main tenet of his deism? In an earlier study of Voltaire's writings, Mason has already set forth some incisive interpretations of their meaning, both as individual works and as examples of particular genres; this elegantly brief account of his deeds and experiences is explicitly intended to supplement the other. Yet that division of labour is somewhat unfortunate, since even so colourful a life as Voltaire's would seem still to elude a fuller intellectual biography. He may have been the foremost spokesman of the Enlightenment, but he was not the sort of philosopher who systematically set out first principles. Perhaps a trifle more light, therefore, could have been cast here on those ideas which would be his duly recorded claim, that he was like a little stream, "clear because it is shallow".

Through colonialist windows

By Anthony Delius

NGUGI WA THIONG'O:
Detained
A Writer's Prison Diary
232pp. Heinemann. £7.50 (paperback, £2.25).
0 435 90650 X

Writers in Politics
Essays
142pp. Heinemann. £7.50.
0 435 91752 8

C. J. DRIVER:
Patrick Duncan
South African and Pan-African
315pp. Heinemann. £19.50.
0 435 96300 0

Africa, from north to south, remains a dangerous place for writers. The most extreme case is Uganda, where four playwrights were murdered in a single year by Idi Amin's henchmen. About the same time, next door in Kenya, under rather more enlightened rule, another playwright, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, spent a year in a maximum security prison – and in consequence lost his university job – for unspecified dangerous "activities and utterances". Ngugi claims, in two recently published books, that the main "activity and utterance" was to have written and produced a play in the Gikuyu language among the mud huts of his native village.

In so doing, with the help of a co-author and half the village, Ngugi was putting a burning conviction into practice. He is passionately persuaded that not until works about African peasants and workers are created and performed in their own languages will the true literature and liberation of the continent be achieved. Conversely, he maintains that the continued use of English, French and Portuguese as Africa's main literary and political languages will only stunt the expression of the deeper aspirations and culture of all Africans. Instead Africans should communicate across their 100 (or 1,000, depending on definition) language barriers through the more indigenous medium of that product of long Afro-Asian contact, Kiswahili.

Ngugi's views on writing in European languages are close to those of the Nigerian critic, Obi Wali, who wrote in 1963 that "until these writers and their western midwives accept that any true African literature must be written in an African language, they would only be pursuing a dead end". The outstanding African writer in English today, the novelist Chinua Achebe, declared in 1964, "I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home, but altered to suit its new African surroundings." Later the South African critic, Ezekiel Mphahlele, pointed out that the South African Government's insistence on the use of African languages in so-called "Bantu Education" was aimed at weakening the influence of the local English-educated African Nationalist leaders. Ngugi's retort to this is that it was the schoolchildren of Soweto rather than these leaders who showed "the correct path of resistance to fascism" – although he overlooks the fact that the Soweto schoolchildren began their fight by demanding to be taught in English as "their window on the world".

However, the kind of world on which European languages provide a window leads Ngugi to raise his cry against them.

His case is that the continued use of the languages of the former colonizers has meant that the old subjugation has swiftly been replaced by "neo-colonialism". As a result, the new rulers of Africa, such as the late President Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya and his successor, have been seduced into becoming the badmaisons of Western (and Japanese) imperialism. As black imitators of the former white bourgeois exploiters the independence leaders have, according to Ngugi, betrayed the ideals of the old freedom-fighters, particularly the

freedom-fighters of the Mau Mau, imitators of the long Kenyan resistance to British rule. One can see why the Kenyan authorities may have resented strong hints of this betrayal being spread among the grassroots by plays in Gikuyu – previously Ngugi had developed the theme by means less likely to develop mass appeal, novels in English, including the novel for which he is best known in more literate circles, the rather lumbering *Petals of Blood*.

Ngugi complains that Makerere University, which developed under the wing of London University, merely turned him into "a parrot and animated puppet mouthing phrases prepared for me in European textbooks". He began to acquire a different international outlook at Leeds University, but the repetition of familiar phrases in his denunciation of Western capitalism and culture makes one wonder whether he wasn't turned into another kind of parrot. Yet there is far more than the swopping of one intellectual prefrontal lobe chip for another in Ngugi's present views, so powerfully expressed in his two latest books, *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, and *Writers in Politics*. They offer absorbingly interesting insights into the condition of African writers and post-independence Africa, as well as its goals, both physical and circumstantial.

If Marx and Engels keep breaking through in Ngugi's demand for total political commitment in writers, there is also devotion to heroes like Dedan Kimathi, most attractive of the Mau Mau leaders hunted to death by the British, and J. M. Karuki, author of *Mau Mau Detainees* and a too-critical MP, later murdered by agents of the Kenyan government. Ngugi's loathing of literary racism stems from the condemnation and misrepresentation of much popular journalism and novel-writing about Kenya. Even the much admired Karen Blixen bucketed game and Africans in descriptions of Kenya's rural attractions, and Ngugi accordingly places her in the tradition of "great racist like Huene, Hegel, Trollope, Trevor-Roper". He feels a certain sympathy for Ngugi's railing rhetoric against western "sugary liberalism" when he attacks William Blake for his "Little Black Boy", and Alan Paton for his obvious preference in *Cry, the Beloved Country* for humble old black peasants as against militant black politicians.

Advancing outward from the Kenyan particular, Ngugi calls for a grand alliance of peasants and workers of the Afro-Asian world, together with those of the black "diaspora" spread across the Americas and adjacent islands, to form the main opposition to "the great cultural military design" of the bourgeoisie (West and Japan). Looking across the Atlantic he distinguishes among black Americans the same division between backsliders and the faithful as among the politicians and writers at home.

The sell-out position of Wheatley and [Booker T.] Washington has been continued in writers like Martin Luther King, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Whitney Young, Eldridge Cleaver and other thinkers and spokesmen. . . . The other trend of Banneker (David Walker-Douglas [the early Douglass]) has been continued in the work of people like DuBois, Paul Robeson, Richard Wright, Malcolm X and George Jackson.

He finds American white society barbarous and hypocritical, and even the better parts of the Declaration of Independence must be attributed to the Afro-American worker – "All the notions in that declaration were first articulated in slave revolts and songs".

"The world of literature Ngugi sees as to a great extent divided between 'Great Writers' and racists. Great writers are those 'aware of a changing world', like 'Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Conrad, Sholokov, Chinua Achebe'. One even has to be a bit careful of Shakespeare who tells us 'How Prospero sees Caliban but not how Caliban

him sees Prospero' and may be unwittingly used for imperialist propaganda by the British Council. A handy list of better-known writers is provided as examples of Freudian leaks from the supercilious Western subconscious. They include Rider Haggard (*King Solomon's Mines*); Julius Buchanan (*Prester John*); Rudyard Kipling (*The Mowgli stories*); Robert Ruark (*Uluru*) and *Something of Value*; Nicholas Monsarrat (*The Tribe That Lost Its Head*).

Whatever may be thought of some of Ngugi's political and literary judgments, there can be no doubting his determination to see that any changes for the better shall not be confined to the top ten per cent – some say five per cent – of Africa's black millions. Ngugi calls upon his fellow black writers not to retreat into "individualism, mysticism and formalism", still less into a vapid "universalism". Instead, they must join proletarian and peasant struggles and use their talents against "landlords and chiefs, the big-business African classes that at the same time act in union and concert with foreign business interests". He sees African standing at the heart of the global struggle against exploitation, because its peoples have been so uniquely subjected to colonizers in the past and "neo-colonialists" today. The poor of Europe are included among those to be liberated in the wider struggle, and white activists and writers can join the fight.

Some of the choices and difficulties of whites eager to enter the battle for a fair share for the Afro-Asian majority in what still seems to many to be a white-run world may be gauged from C. J. Driver's well-written and heartfelt biography of Patrick Duncan. Its subject died fourteen years ago after giving practically his all in flesh, blood, money and political passion over a quarter of a century in the cause of the black people of South Africa. Despite this, he remained to the end recognizably bourgeois and deeply suspicious of socialism – a fact which would not instantly recommend him to Ngugi.

Duncan was the eldest son of the first South African to become Governor-General. After attending a distinguished English public school, he went on to Oxford, and finally married into the British aristocracy – a happy union which he once described as "marrying Europe". However, he regarded himself as spiritually and politically rooted in Africa, and owing a debt to the blacks for his father's part in the process which ended in apartheid. Determined to see that the British should not eventually hand over the people of their Basutoland Protectorate to South African control, Duncan began his career in the Colonial Service there. Increasingly, he be-

came a source of irritation to his fellow colonial officers – "I boiled inside when I saw the terrible way in which chiefs and administrators were neglecting their flock, the people", he wrote. He threw himself into the life of the Basuto people, learned their language and laws, and played a considerable part in the negotiations which brought the country independence as Lesotho.

Mentally restless and wide-ranging in his interests, and physically energetic (despite being lame while a schoolboy), Duncan required a larger scene – an urge perhaps accentuated by a sense of his social importance. The opportunity presented itself in the rising storm provoked in South Africa by apartheid, which was already swirling around the borders of the Basuto enclave, and sometimes, even, spilling over them. Most of South Africa's white opposition sought to defeat the Nationalists by legal and parliamentary manoeuvre, but Duncan held that the Government could only be ousted by mass action on the Gandhian model – more particularly by African mass action. Soon he had plunged into the defiance of Unjust Laws campaign being run by the African National Congress, the major black political movement, and was arrested and jailed, along with Asian and African protesters, for breaking apartheid regulations.

The campaign collapsed, but for the rest of the 1950s Duncan was involved in many of the more dramatic events of the anti-apartheid movement. Whether as national organizer of the newly formed Liberal Party, as editor of his own liberal periodical, *Contact*, or seeking support in Britain and America, his aim was to align as many whites as possible with the black masses in resistance to apartheid. By the time the 1960 Emergency broke over the country Duncan's hopes of the whites were rapidly declining and he threw his main energies behind the Pan-African Congress, then suspected of being anti-white. The PAC had newly broken away from the ANC, accusing that body of being too heavily influenced by whites, especially white communists. Duncan himself always declared that communists would be just as oppressive in South Africa as the Nationalists. Following the banning of the two black nationalist movements, Duncan himself was banned and escaped to work for the PAC in Dar-es-Salaam, and then in Algiers.

Even when critics in the plot-riddled PAC managed to have him dismissed, Duncan was glad to find a job which kept him in Africa until just before his death of a rare blood disease in 1967. His life leaves an impression of an enthusiastic amateur in politics and journalism,

prepared even to dabble in violence towards the end, but unfaltering in his devotion to the cause of the African people. Ngugi might be tempted to say that such a great outpouring of words and activity resulted in little apparent achievement because Duncan remained incorrigibly a bourgeois, unaware of the contradictions posed by the true motives of his class in its intentions towards Africans. A more generous and less didactic view would be that of Duncan's biography: "The overthrow of the apartheid-state will take more time than he had, and more lives (and deaths) than his alone".

The struggle against apartheid may well be over long before the struggle to replace English and French by African languages, or even Swahili, gets under weigh. Even then the continent could be dotted with several language battles rather than a general one and the African linguistic scene could become far more crowded and confusing than it is now. Advocates of greater literary activity in African languages could be sobered by the Indian attempt to replace English with Hindi, or encouraged by the hitherto successful containment of several national cultures within the Soviet Union, or perhaps the Afrikaner campaign to establish Afrikaans in the face of English dominance in South Africa – though Ngugi and his supporters may not care for inspiration from such a quarter.

As for the material or mechanical requirement for such changes, there is the great heritage of the consolidation of dozens of spoken African languages into written ones through the exertions of Christian missionaries anxious to encourage their flocks to read the Bible – again Ngugi might not care for this reminder. Added to this has been the recent huge expansion in the number of overseas publishers operating in Africa, all eager to profit by the growth of literacy – an expansion that has been matched by local publishers determined that the European enterprises shall not command the market, either financially or culturally. (Again Duncan was in at the beginning of this latter development with his *Africa Books*, and close publisher friends of his saw the possibilities.) There remains the question of how willingly the many African writers in English and French will exchange moderately profitable international markets (within Africa and outside) for the lower financial returns (if any) in local languages. More translators and double publications might ease this economic problem, though it seems just as likely to increase it. Perhaps only the centuries can offer a solution, as they did in the gradual replacement of Latin by local vernaculars in Europe.

For the record

By Julius Lewin

ELLEN HELLMANN and HENRY LEVER (Editors):
Race Relations in South Africa 1929-1979

278pp. Macmillan. £12.
0 333 294 831

A stranger to Johannesburg would not expect to find the South African Institute of Race Relations still flourishing, but it is. By its integrity and skill has convinced even the Government that it is a constructive, not subversive body, and as such the most reliable source of information on racial policy. Founded in 1929 with the aid of American funds, it was directed by its first eighteen years by J. D. Rheinfelt Jones. He had the talent appropriate to the task and his achievements, perhaps more fruitful than those of any other South African liberal, deserve recognition.

As late as the 1930s anyone who wanted to ascertain the facts about "native policy" (as it was then called) had to rely on his own efforts. There were scarcely any books on the subject worth reading; and the four English-language universities were only beginning to wake up to the unique opportunities at hand for research. Rheinfelt Jones stimulated those concerned with the condition of black people to collect material which was then processed and published by the Institute. Its annual *Surveys of race relations* became and remain a praiseworthy series.

A cynic might say that since the Institute was founded the Government's racial policy has grown worse year after year. But this has not discouraged the Institute from recording and criticizing the Government. Its regular conferences and meetings have helped to prepare public opinion for the changes which are now contemplated. Perhaps with an instinct for survival, the Institute has never attempted to interpret the dynamics of change, nor has it paid enough attention to white racism or

to the nature and persistence of colour prejudice. Its members are mostly white. Its preferred strategy, of discussion, has attracted only a few black members to it, nor are there likely to be more at a time when inter-racial co-operation of any kind has dwindled to a bare minimum and Africans have despaired of achieving equality with whites by constitutional means.

Two features of race relations in South Africa are still neglected, in part because relevant facts and figures are hard to come by. One is the hopeless position of the millions of labourers and their families on white-owned farms. The other is the unchanging position of 500,000 migrant mine labourers. Yet no picture of South Africa is complete unless these two elements are given the notice demanded by their importance.

The ten contributors to this book have done a very good job under conditions that called for zeal and tenacity. They deserve to be warmly complimented.

Russian and the Russians

By J. Miller

BERNARD COMRIE:

The Languages of the Soviet Union
317pp. Cambridge University Press.
£27.50 (paperback, £8.50).
0 521 23250 9

Ignorance of the Soviet Union is manifested daily in this country in the indiscriminate use of the terms *Soviet* and *Russian*, *Soviet Union* and *Russia*. To dispel this ignorance is Bernard Comrie's aim in the first chapter of this book, in which he discusses the enormous range of diverse languages and cultures in the Soviet Union, together with the problems of creating written standards for unwritten languages and of finding a linguistic framework for the Soviet Union and various areas within it.

The other five chapters of the book, on the languages and language-families of the Soviet Union, are unsatisfactory and need not be dealt with here at any length. They are unsatisfactory both because of the data presented in them and the manner of their presentation. The data are too restricted. The preface states that one aim of the book is to describe the salient features of the languages and language-families of the USSR but this aim is later reduced to describing particular topics of general linguistic interest: vowel-harmony in Altaic, the phonetics of Caucasian languages, negation and case-marking in Uralic. While Comrie's reason for this restrictiveness is plausible — he wants to avoid giving a superficial survey of every aspect of language-structure — he does not have gone to the other extreme like this. A relatively detailed account, including the topics he has chosen, could have been given of one language in each major family. As it is, the book contains certain facts about the various languages but the lack of information on their general structure, against which these facts could be measured, ensures that they re-

main a collection of curios.

It is pertinent to ask too about the book's likely readership. Obviously it is intended for professional linguists but Comrie hints at a wider audience when he begins Chapter One thus: "To many educated people outside the Soviet Union, the concept U.S.S.R. is virtually synonymous with Russia, and the adjective Soviet with Russian." Indeed, this opening chapter should be read by anyone interested in the diversity of languages and cultures in the Soviet Union, whereas the others will be inaccessible to anyone without a thorough knowledge of theoretical linguistics.

Chapter One, then, is the most important part of the book for general readers and professional linguists alike. As well as illuminating the linguistic complexity of the USSR, it enables one to reconsider certain concepts and attitudes relating to variation in language. No speaker of a language can remain unaware of variations, such as differences in pronunciation or vocabulary, or between formal and informal language. In discussions of such variations the terms *dialect* and *language* are employed and it is important to realize that these have both an everyday and a technical use. In everyday usage, based on social and political criteria, *language*, often preceded by *proper*, is positive, whereas *dialect*, often preceded by *mere*, is pejorative. In the technical business of language classification *dialect* simply denotes a smaller entity than a language. Dialects are grouped into language-families according to criteria such as shared vocabulary, syntax, morphology and phonology, though the appropriate grouping is often far from obvious.

In this country the relationship between the various dialects of English has long been stable, in that one dialect has been the undisputed standard, used in writing and in formal activities such as delivering lectures, sermons or judgments in court — so stable that it is easy to think of the

standard dialect as being intrinsically superior to the others. The relationship between the various languages in Britain — English, Gaelic and Welsh — was long quiescent, so that it seemed natural if regrettable that Gaelic and Welsh should gradually die out. The recent determination by speakers of these languages, however, to use their language in many situations where only English had been used before demonstrates that the speakers' attitude is crucial and that conflicts between different languages, especially where one language is dominant, are never far away. Similar conflicts have become apparent even in the United States and Australia, where the existence of hundreds of other languages previously in everyday use.

The Soviet Union is no less complex in this respect than the United States or the former British Empire. Even in the earliest days of the Kiev state the East Slavs lived beside, and eventually assimilated, Finno-Ugric tribes. After the grand dukes of Muscovy established themselves in the sixteenth century as Tsars of Russia, the Russians began to spread. Their conquest of the Tatar empire in the mid-sixteenth century was followed by the acquisition of territory belonging to Turkic-speaking nations in what is now Soviet Asia, to Finno-Ugric tribes throughout Siberia and to various Caucasian groups, including the Georgians and Armenians. In Eastern Europe, meanwhile, there were skirmishes with Swedes and Poles and the acquisition of Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Finland and part of Poland.

As a result of these acquisitions, the map at the front of Comrie's book shows eighty-five different ethnic groups, most of whom have their own language, so that all the problems of dialect, standard dialect and language are present in the Soviet Union in abundance. Where ethnic groups have no written language the first question to be decided is whether they speak dialects that could be grouped together as a

language or whether these dialects should be regarded as separate languages. From dialects that can be grouped together, one had to be chosen as the basis of the written language. The complications that arise here are illustrated by the history of Uzbek, the Turkic language of Uzbekistan, whose capital is Tashkent. The first written standard was based on a northern dialect, but as Tashkent grew its dialect became recognized as the standard. The problem is to find the dialect with the largest number of speakers, or the "central" dialect intelligible to most speakers of other dialects: with respect to vocabulary, syntax and so on, all dialects are equal.

The establishment of a written standard does not ensure the survival of a language under pressure from a rival language enjoying political and technological advantages, and the major task of every language in the Soviet Union is to find a modus vivendi with Russian itself. The criteria which indicate the health of a language are whether it is written; whether it is used in education and if so at primary and/or secondary and/or tertiary level; and whether it is used in local administration. Some languages, such as Georgian, Armenian, Lithuanian and Estonian, are strong, others are dying and many survive in cramped conditions. Comrie interprets current trends as indicating that Russian will replace all other languages in the USSR except those whose speakers are numerous and gathered together in one area, and his interpretation is supported by the preliminary results of the 1979 census, which show that Russian has spread quite noticeably since the previous census of 1970.

Whatever one's opinion of the Soviet Union and its system of government, there is no need to regard the spread of Russian as the result of malevolent policy. Comrie uses statistics to demonstrate its extent but statistics conceal the attitudes of those groups caught up in the change. According to official pronouncements, the Soviet population

wishes to master Russian in order to lead full lives as Soviet citizens, but it is possible that many people merely wish to escape from the countryside to the town and require Russian to obtain an appropriate job and permission to move. On the other hand, the Armenians in Georgia may be switching to Russian rather than to Georgian as their second language as a way of asserting their difference from the Georgians. Other questions occur to one: What proportion of the population of Central Asia adheres to Islam and sees Russian as an infidel language? What effect will the high birth-rate in Central Asia and the declining rate in Russia proper have on language attitudes?

Two further facts are suggestive. According to the 1979 census, 37.7 per cent of the non-Russian population of the USSR claim not to speak fluent Russian, which suggests either resistance to the language or inefficient teaching or great modesty on their parts. Secondly, the Russians proper regard their language as superior to any other, an attitude shared by ancient émigrés in Paris and generations of Soviet Russians alike, and which is reflected in the statistics: 42.6 per cent of non-Russians are bilingual but only 3.1 per cent of Russians, in spite of the presence of many such in the Baltic states, Central Asia and Siberia.

Although official Soviet policy is to foster local languages where practicable, the linguistic arrogance of the Russians proper, combined with their military, economic, technological and political power, will overcome all but the most determined speech communities. The attitude of these communities is vital but without field-work little will be known about it and given Soviet sensitivity in such matters there is no reason to suppose that the field-work will ever be done or that the results would be made publicly available if it were. In any case, the important fact laid before us by Comrie is that the Soviet Union is not a monotonous red linguistically and culturally speaking, but variegated and full of contrast.

Rhythm method

By Peter France

YURI TYNIANOV:

The Problem of Verse Language
Edited and translated by
Michael Sosa and Brent Harvey
170pp. Ann Arbor, Michigan:
Ardis. \$15.
0 88233 464 6

The title and the author's name on this volume, together with an afterword by Roman Jakobson, lead one to expect more than is delivered. One finishes reading it with a sense of wasted effort and opportunity.

There is no doubt about the importance of Yuri Tynianov. As Russian Formalism has been more studied in the West, he has emerged increasingly clearly as a powerfully intelligent literary theorist and critic and as a central figure in the movement, principally perhaps because of his work on literary evolution.

All his life Tynianov was concerned with questions of verse language, and the present volume contains a translation of his most important work on the subject. It was written in the two or three years before 1924, and to be properly understood it needs to be read in its historical context, a context of intense literary polemic. Something of this is provided here, though the editors' introduction, though principally of a restatement of Tynianov's arguments.

His essential point concerns the distinction between prose and verse (not poetry, which is seen as a largely vacuous concept). In the central section of the essay (the final pages of Part One), he draws a firm line between these two kinds of verbal expression, showing that apparently intermediate phenomena, such as

"poetic prose" or free verse only serve to demonstrate more clearly the basic gulf. The difference has nothing to do with the image (as in Potemkin's theories); verse is verse, according to Tynianov, because in it rhythm is the dominant constructive factor, subordinating all other elements. In a line of verse (for the line is the basic unit), words are more closely welded together than in prose and this has a deforming effect on the semantics of individual words. Tynianov studies this process in detail in the second part of his work.

There is a good deal that is valuable and interesting here, though of course much work has been done on such questions in the nearly sixty years since the book was first published, and one may question the value of this volume for those who are primarily concerned with the study of verse rather than with Russian Formalism. Furthermore, the dominance of Russian examples limits the interest of this book very considerably for those who do not understand the original.

As for Russian speakers, they would be well advised to read the easily available original, for this translation cannot be recommended. It is bad in a number of ways. Often it is simply wrong — and this includes the verse examples as well as Tynianov's prose. Thus in a passage from Bolleau's second satire quoted on page 120, "la bizarre" (which in the context is a personification for rhyme) is mystifyingly rendered as "the bizarre" and the lines:

Si je trouve Philis en miracles / Je le trouve en miracles / Je le trouve en miracles / Je le trouve en miracles

lines which means something like "If I want to say to which Russian poets Phoebus has been gracious, Derzhavin springs to mind, but Kheraskov finds his way into the poem". Here this gives the nonsensical:

Were I to say to whom of the Russians the career of Phoebus, Derzhavin bursts into verse, but Kheraskov arrives.

There is presumably a misprint here to make matters worse (there are many of them in this volume), but

Stringed instruments

By Gordon Brotherston

MARCIA and ROBERT ASCHER:
Code of the Quipu
A Study in Media, Mathematics, and Culture

166pp. The University of Michigan Press. \$18.95 (paperback, \$8.95).
0 472 09325 8

Generally known by its Quechua name, the quipu once served to record and communicate facts of life throughout the vast empire of the Incas. Used systematically, it could memorize anything from the statistics of food supply and demography to the formulae of liturgy and imperial history. Anxious to convert Peru, the Spaniards destroyed whole libraries of quipus as they did libraries of native books in Mexico, and for the same reason: the quipu was the touchstone of all that opposed them.

The strength of Marcia and Robert Ascher's work stems in the first instance from their effort to catalogue all surviving examples of the quipu, some 400 in number. In order to

define what it is, its necessary and possible characteristics. In doing this they focus upon it as a physical object. Indeed, they teach their readers how to make one of their own, how to twist dyed wool or cotton into strings which, knotted in various ways, are hung serially along a main cord. Homely enough in itself, this exercise serves well to bring out the principles of quipu literacy, and the categories of information it may logically convey.

In attempting to discover what the quipus of Inca bureaucrats once did convey, the Aschers appeal Spanish chroniclers on the one hand and material evidence from modern Peru on the other. But this is not enough to reconstruct the programmes within which these knotty records actually functioned, like computer cards. So when it comes to analyses of particular quipus they concentrate mainly on statistical data, though they conclude by reminding us of the vast range of logical operations which come under the heading of mathematics.

Lucid, didactic and sometimes a bit pretentious, the Aschers' brief

study of the quipu is easily the best to date. Its only obvious limitation arises from their reluctance to explore texts which to some degree transcribe quipus into alphabetic Quechua or Spanish, like the Viracocha ralo chant, the play *Ollanta*, or Guaman Poma's anatomy of the Incas state (part one of his Letter to Philip II). According to its author, this last involved direct translation from official quipu records: if nothing else the mere structure of its chapters and formulae illustrations should encourage us to make far more of it than the Aschers do.

Yes, he was a man, on the entire earth
I will never find such a man.

When first I ran to cast myn eyen upon this book of *The Organ Maker's Wife*, I bethought myself, here is a merle tale, and wittall full of high matter. I was weary of the wilderness of new-fangled works, and lusted, as after a clear spring, for some ancient tale of revelry and romance. But, sooth to say, I was sore deceived, for ywis, here is nought else but y same old rignarole of domestic travell, albeit 'tis tricked out in a fustian garb of olden times.

Shorn of its Tudor trappings, the story might find a more conventional setting in the home counties, with an advertising agency, rather than Henry VIII's Reformation, supplying the baddies. Rendered into modern English the plot runs thus: John, a skilled metal-worker (organ-maker) is forced by an unscrupulous multinational company (the church) to accept a deal by which, in return for a three year contract, he agrees to marry the personnel manager's daughter (a nun) who has got herself pregnant by an actor. The girl, Kate, turns out to be a complete neurotic, useless about the house, rude to John's friends and utterly hostile to his aunt who lives with them. Sexually she alternates between frigidity and desire with bewildering rapidity. As she becomes unstable, she takes to lying in rivers and mouthing terrorist (anti-Reformation) slogans, for which she is eventually executed.

It may seem crude to summarize such a carefully-wrought and well-presented book in this brief manner, but, unfortunately Paul Britten Austin's style is an elaborate cod-piece for a sadly disappointing lay. He adopts a promising, if conventional formula of multiple narrators for the story. A modern author assembles and translates a jumble of jottings on "two great roles of mildewed paper found in an old house in Hampshire.

Off the leash

By Carol Rumens

LEONARD MICHAELS:

The Men's Club
181pp. Cape. £5.95.
0 224 02925 8.

The Men's Club is a provocative title that seems to herald male chauvinism's answer to *The Women's Room* and novels of that genre; a flogging of defensive salves, perhaps, or even a counter-attack claiming that the problems caused by negative discrimination are nothing to those engendered by the positive variety. But in fact, for all its surface liveliness, Michaels's novel turns out to have little to add to the increasingly lustre debate on sexual politics; its effect is merely to corroborate traditional views of the male and female character (female=nurturing, male=aggressive), despite a hint of taboos being turned (almost literally; a dresser is crashed to the floor by an irate wife) in the final pages.

Michaels writes a choppy, muscle-flexing prose, intending, perhaps, to express an ironical stance towards the Mannerist style of literary tough-talking. Having accustomed oneself to nouns lopped of their articles and full-stops like kicks in the shins, one must admit that such a style has the virtue of tightness and immediacy, and also that it modulates easily into dialogue, a useful facility in a novel whose action takes place in the context of a group discussion.

Kramer is a psychotherapist (what else?) who invites an assortment of

friends to join him in a little informal soul-searching at his home in Berkeley, the one-time capital of Radical Chic. The narrator, himself a guest, suggests that everyone should tell the story of his life, and Kramer begins, even supplying a footlocker of visual aids — the photos of all the women (622) he has ever laid. "I was reminded of flashers," comments the narrator succinctly, if not very originally. "See this. It is my entire erotic." For "life" we are already, of course, reading "sex-life" — a neat comment on the prevalent modern view.

The narrator's role as conscience of the group remains a shadowy one. Though a kind of catalyst who, despite his private reservations, encourages the others to keep talking, he too is shown to be at the mercy of the collective mind, allowing it to sweep him away in its headlong dive towards its worst instincts. Beer and marijuana peel off the first layer of inhibitions, helped by the heady sense of being "off the leash". As the narrator says at the start, "To be wretchedly truthful, any social possibility unrelated to wife, kids, house and work felt like a form of adultery. Not criminal. Not legitimate."

It is a little as if Golding's *Lord of the Flies* had been transposed to middle-class, middle-aged California. Ominously, the room where the drama takes place is furnished in sophisticated-primitive style: it is shadowy, form-hung, with a table of pink wood ("a veritable tree ripped from the monkey jungle") and "acrylic paintings like glistering viscera splashed off a butcher's block". But, despite all the jockeying for position and the mild victimization of

Harold Canterbury, the whey-faced outsider, the regression is to badly-behaved childhood rather than savagery.

Stopping bloodletting, the men become the murderers of food, drink and possessions. Their riding of the fringe is presumably intended by the author to be interpreted as a sexual assault; not only was the food prepared by Kramer's wife, Nancy, it was meant for consumption by the members of her women's group the following day. As drunkenness progresses, the men indulge in a spot of knife-throwing against the kitchen door, and Harold Canterbury's prowess wins him back some of his lost esteem. Michaels builds the suspense in masterly style, but the climax is somewhat inadequate. Blood is drawn at last (by a woman) but the victim scarcely seems to notice amid the slaughtering of furniture. By now it is dawn and, incredibly, the men are still hungry. They set off joyously to slake their indefatigable appetites with breakfast in San Francisco.

The symbolism of food dominates the book. Even the most sustained and pivotal of the sexual confessions is about a man's desertion of the woman he loves because she steals a forkful of his pudding. It is not easy to sympathize with his chagrin, particularly as the dish in question is strawberries under flaming chocolate, a concoction that sounds more like a metaphor than a dessert. The novel falls short of its ambitions for "acrylic painting like glistering viscera splashed off a butcher's block". But, despite all the jockeying for position and the mild victimization of

Tudor trappings

By David Nokes

PAUL BRITTEN AUSTIN:

The Organ Maker's Wife
388pp. Duckworth. £8.95.
0 7156 1599 8

When first I ran to cast myn eyen upon this book of *The Organ Maker's Wife*, I bethought myself, here is a merle tale, and wittall full of high matter. I was weary of the wilderness of new-fangled works, and lusted, as after a clear spring, for some ancient tale of revelry and romance. But, sooth to say, I was sore deceived, for ywis, here is nought else but y same old rignarole of domestic travell, albeit 'tis tricked out in a fustian garb of olden times.

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The original author of these was a monk who collected and transcribed the various tales of John the organ-maker and his wife current in Romney and Winchester in the sixteenth century. But the work gives us none of the authentic feeling of Tudor literature. Here are no interpolated tales, no allegories, no digressions, none of the joyous richness of metaphor that one hopes for from such a work of historical imagination, and such as one finds in John Barth's *The Sea and the Sirens*, or Robert Nye's *Pilgrimage*. The language itself often sounds false, as if modern clichés have been rather laboriously translated into their Tudor equivalents. The single brief interpolated anecdote — inevitably about farting — confirms the general sense that the author has little real confidence or flair in moulding his pastiche.

The book appears to be attempting an interesting and difficult task; that of presenting a simple domestic conflict as it might have appeared four centuries ago. Austin seems deliberately to have sought to construct a historical fiction which is not self-consciously literary, which does not soar on wings of mock-epic imagery, or descend into *fabliau* farce. But the result is an exasperating *mélange*. We are presented with a scene that is familiar to us in a post-industrial,

post-Freudian context, but we are required to understand it in medieval terms alone. It is like reading with one eye closed, and one half of the brain anesthetized. Understanding is obscured by the language of "ywis", "in sooth" and "peradventure", and by the warring prejudices of the pro-Reformation and anti-Reformation factions. None of these elements enhances, philosophically or aesthetically, the presentation of the emotional problems at the heart of the novel. Instead they create a kind of fog, through which we peer at dimly discernible characters. Nor is this a work like Golding's *The Inheritors*, in which we are required to explore and re-learn the fundamentals of our civilization by being immersed in a primitive consciousness.

At times the book seems to hint at allegory; John and his mystically pregnant wife occasionally suggest the Holy Family. But the hint is not sustained for long. Henry VIII's early interest in play-acting is confused in Kate's disordered mind with memories of her own seduction. This is another false trail. The book labours mightily to individualize several Chaucerian favourites, including an Abbess and a summoner, but fails to make them more than stereotypes of yore old England.

Criminal proceedings

The Leper of Saint Giles, by Ellis Peters (223pp. Macmillan. £5.50. 0 333 319855 0), the fifth chronicle of Brother Cadfael, gardener and herbalist at the Benedictine monastery of Shrewsbury, takes place in October 1139. Cadfael delicately unpicks the tangled elms of events surrounding the murder of Huo de Domville, killed just before his marriage to the wealthy heiress Iveta de Massard. Once again Ellis Peters has combined a proper, carefully plotted detective story with a carefully detailed, convincing evocation of medieval life, and once again the combination is as successful and as gripping as before.

The tondo in Peter Laebald's *Tondo for Short* (221pp. Collins. £6.50. 0 00 231040 6) is Michelangelo's other tondo, nearly half a ton of marble depicting Cupid and Psyche; it is stolen from the Royal Glubbman Foundation in Bell Malt. Florence-born Inspector Franco Corri, of the Yard's Art and Antiques Squad, is given the task of looking for it and falls into a good thick minestrone of incidents. Peter Laebald has perhaps crammed rather too much in the way of intrigues and events into his first novel, but it is an entertaining and promising debut, while Franco could easily have a long career in front of him.

T. J. Blayon

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